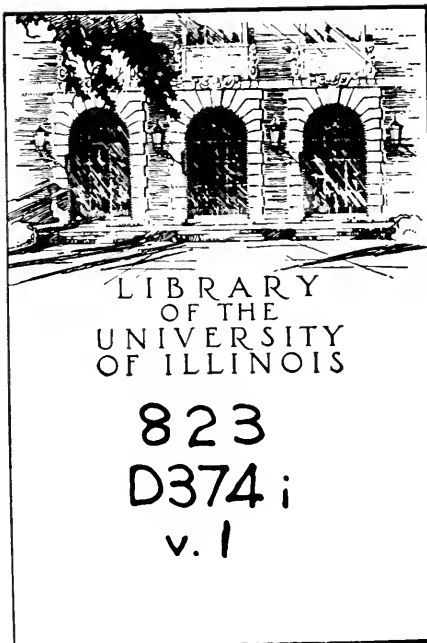


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IN MAREMMA

A Story

BY OUIDA

'AMOR CH' A NULLO AMATO AMAR PERDONA'



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

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In Memory
OF
THOSE HOSPITABLE DOORS
WHICH
THE ETRUSCAN LION GUARDS
This Tale
OF AN ETRUSCAN TOMB
Is Dedicated
TO
MY DEAR FRIENDS
THE STORYS

Jan. Rev. Ray, 31 y 6, 53
Burdick 21 Sept. 53

NOTE.

It is needless to recall to the scholar, but it may be as well to tell the general reader, that the ‘golden warrior’ stretched on a couch of rock, who vanished as the air entered the long-closed tomb, was thus found by Avvolta in the famous tumuli of the Montarozzi opened in the year 1823.



IN MAREMMA.

CHAPTER I.

THERE was a very busy crowd gathered in the cathedral square of garden-girdled Grosseto.

It was the end of October, and the town and all the country round it were awakening from the summer desolation and sickness that reign throughout Maremma from springtime till autumn, whilst all the land is sunburnt and storm-harassed and fever-stricken, and no human beings are left in it, save the tired sentinels at their posts along the shore, and a few villagers too poor to get away, sickening amidst the salt and the seaweed.

With late October the forests begin to glow with a golden tinge or a scarlet flush, the fever abates and slackens its hold, the ague-trembling limbs grow stronger, the north winds come, and the swamps are healthy with the smell of the sea or the scent of the woods ; the land that has been baked and cracked till it looks like dried lava, or has been soaked by torrential rains till it is one vast smoking morass, becomes ready for cultivation.

Then the real life of Maremma begins ; down from the mountains of the Lucchese and Pistoiese districts labourers troop by the thousand ; shepherds come from the hills with long lines of flocks ; herds of horses and cattle go daily by the roads ; hunters chase the boar and buck, and charcoal burners and ploughmen pour themselves in busy legions over the plains and the woods.

The country is then full of the men come from the hills, from far and near, '*il montanino con scarpe grosse e cervello fine*,' whom the Maremmans employ, envies, and detests ; brown, erect, healthy, smiling, stalwart ; looking, beside the pale, swollen, ague-shaken creatures, who live here all the

year through, like life beside death. They are all mountain-born, and chiefly from the chestnut-woods of the northern spurs of the Apennines, where the snow has fallen already ; here, down in the green Maremma, they will, year after year, arrive all their lives through, to plough, and harrow, and sow, to hew, and saw, and burn wood for timber and charcoal, all the winter long ; and then, after waiting perhaps for the first hay stacking or wheat harvest, will go back with the money in their pockets to reap and plough, and gather the nuts, and prune the olive on their own hills ; a half nomadic, half home life that is rough and healthy, changeful and pleasant, and makes them half vagrant and half husbandman ; bitter foes and hot lovers ; faithless ones, too ; for when the Maremma girl sings of her lover, he is always some Pistoiese or Lucchese *damo* from the Apennines, and the burden of her song is always one of absence, of doubt, and of inconstancy.

When he goes away with the rich loads of summer-grass or grain, he goes to his own hamlet up high in the chestnut forests of a healthier land, and it is seldom in-

deed that he will cast any backward look of regret to misty Maremma steaming beneath its torrid suns. And when he comes back another year there,—then he finds some one else.

This day in Grosseto there were many hundreds of these come here for the hiring by owners and stewards of this perilous yet fruitful Maremmano soil ; the same men came for the most part year after year, and were well known ; the market-day was the day to find masters and make terms for their winter labours ; and from here they would all scatter themselves far and wide, north and south, east and west, on their several roads ; some to the swamps and the thickets ; some to the pine and oak woods ; some to the sea-shore towns for the industries of the coast ; some to the vast wheat and oat fields that stretch level and dreary as moorland, and bring forth the finest grain in all Italy.

There were gathered together hundreds and even thousands of them ; but this morning they had other thoughts besides those of their hire and wages ; they were standing under the broad, blue autumnal sky, patient, and yet eager to see a great

sight : no less a sight than the passing through Grosseto of the brigand-chief of Santa-Fiora—Saturnino Mastarna.

The news of his capture had startled the town at midnight when the carabinieri had ridden in, thirty strong, with a man bound hard and fast in the midst of them ; and the Grosseto citizens, for the most part in their beds, had lit their lanterns hurriedly, and thrown open their casements as the tramp of the horses and the clatter of the weapons had awakened them from sleep.

‘They have captured some poor soul!’ the good folks had said with a sigh of sympathy and regret, and had murmured to each other mournfully, ‘*è il nostro Saturnino!*’

As the troop of guards had passed under the walls of their dull little city, a torch here and there flickering on their naked sabres and the barrels of their short carbines, and a moonbeam here and there glistening on the whiteness of their cross-belts and the foam on the manes of their horses, there had been few in Grosseto who did not pity the captive in their midst, with his arms tied tightly by cords behind his back ; few who did not for his sake wish the troopers a sudden death and a bad one,

When the trot of the chargers and the clash of the steel had passed into silence, and the town had lapsed into its wonted quietude, the burghers of Grosseto putting out their lanterns had sighed: '*Quel povero Saturnino, Aïe! Che peccato!*' For Maremma had always adored her Saturnino, and it regretted his capture very greatly; he had never done any harm, he had only robbed the rich, and killed a foreigner now and then; he had been a holy man, and the priests had always been the better for anything he had done; and he had been so precious as a theme for talk in the long dreary winter nights, in the still longer, still drearier, summer days.

Without Saturnino Mastarna, the Maremma would be more than ever desolate.

The province had always been full of sympathy with its great robber, whose popular boast it was that he never had wronged any poor man. All the creatures of the law, soldiers, guards, coastguards, and carabinieri, were hated and shunned throughout the province; got help from none, and were, again and again, baffled and laughed at by the shrewd finesse of the people in the woods, and on the shores. To

cheat a *sbirro* was a loyal task that brought praise and honour to whosoever had accomplished it.

Therefore for years the seizing of Saturnino had been impossible, and scarcely even desired by the authorities, so great an unpopularity was his capture certain to produce.

But at the last the brigand had grown too audacious: he had seized foreigners of note, and foreign governments had bestirred themselves, and it had been thought needful to show some vigour and vigilance against a mocker of the law who would stride about in the towns of the Maremma in festal bravery, secure of immunity, and boasting that no ruler of them all would dare to touch him. Troops had been put in motion; municipalities arraigned by ministers, and at last it was felt that the great days of Saturnino Mastarna must be numbered.

The Government had been told by foreign nations that it behoved its own honour not to leave him at large any longer. So strenuous efforts had been made all summer through, and the hill sides had swarmed with scouts and sharpshooters, and at last on one misty October night, the State had been one

too many for its wary and ferocious son, and Saturnino, asleep and heavy with wine, had been surprised, and after bitter and murderous resistance been vanquished, and dragged from where he dwelt amongst the clouds of the mountain's top, where Monte Labbro reared its silver summit to the whiteness of the moon.

All men of the Maremma had been proud that their province boasted so dread a name as Saturnino's : a name sweeping clear, like a scythe, all the country side of travellers, and resounding even down to the very walls of Rome.

That terrible shape and rumour up there in the mountain-labyrinths above the stormy Fiora water had lent mystery and majesty to the land ; had hung a dread tale to every wayside bush along the lone sea-roads and haunted every thicket of mastic and laurel that grew above the old ways of Porsenna's kingdoms. They had been proud of Saturnino, the great Saturnino, at the lifting of whose voice all the wet grass upon a summer's night would grow suddenly alive with gleaming eyes, and flashing firelocks, as though he called men up from the very stones to do his bidding,

All men in Grosseto this autumn day were talking of that one theme : Saturnino of Santa Fiora—il gran' Saturnino !

So they murmured with one accord, leaving business, and bargains, to crowd together and tell the tale over a thousand times and in a thousand different ways, and agree amongst each other, cordially and with many an oath, that to have captured Saturnino and slung him across a horse's back, with heels tied together like any sheep's, was a sin and shame in the executive.

For Saturnino had been their hero, looming as large as gods loom in the mist of myths. 'He was a man !' they muttered one to another : and then the natives of the little city seized the strangers who came down for the first time from the Lucchese hills, and told them wondrous tales in passionate high-vibrating voices, and cried a hundred times :

'Do your mountains breed the like ? Nay, not they. There is but one Saturnino. Never would he hurt the poor. Nay, not a poor soul in the land but had him for a friend. And a dutiful man too has he always been. When he came down into the towns, straightway would he go to the church and be shriven, and to the Madonna he would

send always half the jewels that he might light upon: a good man and a great! And now, see you, oh the pity of it! They have trapped him and taken him, like any green-finch in a net. Well, he will not be forgotten. We will tell our children's children.'

Then, as talk is always thirsty work, they would go in and drink a good rough red wine, with the Lucchese and Pistoiese strangers, wherever some green bough hung out over a doorway, and over the wine tell how a waggon full of barrels of Neapolitan *Lacrima* had been stopped but last week by Saturnino on the Orbetello road, and the waggoner, because a crusty and unpersuadable obstinate, had been left in the dust with his feet cut off, Saturnino being intolerant of obstinacy.

Meanwhile the yellow autumnal sun shone on the grey stones of Grosseto, and bells clanged, mules brayed, horses champed, swords clattered, and towards the doors of the prison a fresh squadron of carabinieri, come to replace the jaded escort of Saturnino, rode slowly across the square amidst the muttering of the hostile people. What mattered the wine-carrier? He had been only a Romagnolo.

Besides, all Maremma knew that it was not for the wine-carrier at all that their demi-god had been hunted down, but for a *straniero*, that no one cared about except the Government ; a traveller that Saturnino had shot in a paroxysm of jealous rage, and who had been a person of distinction enough for the nation to which he belonged to demand that justice should be done on his assassin. The stranger had been waiting for a ransom to be sent, and had looked at the beautiful Serapia who dwelt with Saturnino too long or too boldly, and Saturnino without waste of words had blown his brains out ; a rash act of violence which had become his own undoing.

And now he had been taken ; taken just like any common thief who robbed an old dame of a copper coin ; taken by those general foes, the soldiery, and brought down into the lower lands with his feet tied under a horse's belly, as helpless as though he were a kid in a butcher's hands. They were restless, curious, passionately eager to see and hear ; but there was only one emotion amongst them—regret. A regret which was full of resentment, and sympathy, and indignation, and which would have burned fiercer

and higher, and become revolt and rescue had not the military force been strong, and the mounted guards many.

All the multitude was awed and chilled. A heavy sense of the power of the law, of a law which they had no sympathy for, and which they feared with the angry fear of impatient resentment, was weighty upon them, like a sheet of lead.

Many of them were sensible of more or less close abetting of the hill thieves, more or less passive or active interest in the lawless acts of the band of Santa Fiora. Many a tradesman there had never sought too curiously to know how the black-browed seller of rich brocades or costly jewellery had come by them, or how foreign gold had found its way to sunburnt, powder-blackened hands.

Even those to whom the great Saturnino was but a name, the youngsters come down for work from the high villages of the Carrarese and Lucchese ranges, were dumbfounded and regretful. Saturnino had always been the friend of the forester and the ploughman and the shepherd; the lads felt that when no more tales could be told of the king of Maremma, savour would be gone out of the goatsflesh roasted in the charcoal in the

woods, and the wineflask passed round when the last of the long furrows had been turned across the plains.

In a gloomy silence, broken only by gloomier mutterings of the crowd, the carabinieri drew rein before the prison.

The closely-packed, loudly chattering groups of men, few women amongst them but many in the doorways of houses and churches, stood gathered together to see him brought out and taken on his next stage to the tribunal of Massa, where his trial was to take place. They were all sorrowful. None blamed him. None thought him a criminal.

Poveretto! he had lived a bold, vigorous, manful life up yonder on the snow-capped hills above the foaming Fiora and down in the deep, dark ravines where the Fiora water rolls, and in the rich vale of the Albegna, and on the treeless lands that stretch away to Ostia far down in the south.

He had been a fierce fellow, indeed, and a terror to all travellers, and many a tale of his ferocity to captives was told from mouth to mouth along the marshy shores of the Maremma, and in the huts of the shepherds on its moors; but the travellers were all strangers, and the captives all rich men,

for from the poor he had never been known to levy a crust or a coin, and the sympathy of the crowds was wholly with him as they hung about the cathedral walls and outside the winehouse doors, waiting until the prisoner should come out with the strong guard that was to march him to his trial at Massa ; which would, they knew, certainly end in his condemnation to the mines of the south or the prisons on the little island that was then glancing to amethyst and gold in the glory of the sunset light, away there to the west on the seas they could not see.

They had not to wait very long. As the time grew near, the people became very quiet in the hush of expectation.

For many and many a year to come, the imagination of the Italian people will be always captivated and blinded by the bastard heroism of the brigand ; he is born of the soil and fast rooted in it ; he has the hearts of the populace with him ; and his most precious stronghold is in their sympathy, from which no laws and no logic of their rulers can dislodge him yet.

Saturnino Mastarna was to all the Maremma shore a hero still.

A few quiet citizens of Grosseto apart,

the people looking on were all for him, and muttered menaces of the guards. The mountaineers and woodcutters, and rough labourers of all kinds that had come down into the town, were most of them men to whom 'to take to the hills' seemed a bold and right thing to do; most of them would have been not unwilling to try it themselves; many of them had been often in secret league and complicity with the terrorism which was no terror to them, because it only struck the rich and never harmed the poor. They would have all been willing to rescue the doomed man, but they paused doubtfully: no one taking the lead.

'*Poveretto! Poveretto!*' they all muttered in regret for him; and had there been an adventurous spirit amidst them to advise his rescue, those gathered labourers of the forests and the plains might have been formidable in their resistance to the law.

But the Italian loves to talk; he loves not equally to act. And so they stood there, sullen, sympathetic, but inert, as the prison gates opened, and the carabinieri rode out with Saturnino in their midst.

The autumnal floods had for the time rendered the railway that runs through Gros-

seto, from north to south, impassable, and the carabinieri had had their orders to ride with him through the twenty odd miles that were under water. It was thought well that the folk of Grosseto, whose traders were suspected of collusion with the brigand, by the purchase of many of his stolen treasures, should see the famous marauder in this sorry plight in their streets. Further south, such a spectacle would have provoked a rescue, or at least a riot; but, in Grosseto, blood ran more quietly and more soberly, and the multitude waiting there only muttered a curse or two as the little troop of horsemen passed out of the court of the prison and came in sight.

With his legs tied beneath his horse, Grosseto saw its fallen hero.

He was in his own mountaineer's dress, a sheepskin jacket, breeches of untanned leather, a sash of brilliant crimson, weather stained, a broad-leafed hat with golden tassels, and in its band a little gold image of Our Lady. At his throat, too, was a Madonnina. His pistols, his knife, his earrings, they had taken away from him; but these little images his captors had left him, from a charitable feeling that it was as well to leave the man,

in such a strait as this, all such aid as he could have from heaven.

His great black eyes were sombre and terrible ; his dark locks hung to his throat, slightly curling, for he had been vain of his good looks ; his lips were rich and red ; his features straight and handsome ; his brow was low, his chest and his limbs were massive. He was the true robber-chief of romance.

Who could say what blood ran in his veins ? His name was the old Etruscan name that had once been that of Servius Tullius ; he had been the son of wild mountain hunters ; who could say what blood of omnipotent Lucumo, of aruspex weighted with the secrets of the stars, of languid and luxurious Lydian, of lustful lord of Sardis, might not be in him, hot and cruel and lascivious ? The Etruscan name had been his forefathers' for hundreds of years counted on the hills.

'Is that truly Saturnino who is taken ?' asked an old woman on the edge of the piazza, a tall gaunt woman with blue eyes and snow-white hair, who had a different accent and look to those of the crowd.

'Aye, mother, that it is,' the man nearest to her answered sorrowfully.

Grosseto knew him well. He had loved to ruffle it, in all his finery, on feast days, in its wineshops and on its public ways, in open bravado and scorn of the power of the law to touch him.

‘Dear God!’ she muttered, ‘how are the mighty fallen! Only the other day and his name was a terror that made the very dead quake in their graves.’

And she pushed a little nearer to see better.

‘It is verily he!’ said the crowds now wistfully gazing up at this fallen majesty, bound there on his horse’s saddle, with the muzzle of a trooper’s carbine resting on either side of him, as the little band halted for a moment in the midst of the cathedral square while the captain bade farewell to the syndic of the town. ‘It is verily he!’ they sighed, and were full of regret. What would Maremma be without its Saturnino?

‘Ay, it is he!’ said the old woman, bending her piercing eyes upon the face of Mastarna. She was a plain-featured, clear-skinned woman, much beaten about by sea-winds and scorched by poisonous suns; but she had a frank, straight, and even noble regard. She dwelt on the low shores of

Maremma, but in her youth she had come from the Alpine ranges of Savoy.

She looked at Saturnino as she stood on the edge of the crowd, and said, 'Ay, ay, it is he!'

'You have seen him before, mother?' said an eager youth, who had come from the Apennines to go and make charcoal in the Ciminian woods away yonder to the south-east.

'Ay, ay,' she said briefly, and said no more, being a woman of few words, who, though she had dwelt here fifty years, was always called the woman of Savoy, and deemed an alien and a stranger.

She was standing near the troop of horsemen, clad in a russet gown, with a yellow handkerchief tied about her white hair. The brigand was sitting in his saddle, sullen, sombre, ashamed: ashamed to be brought thus amidst the people, like a netted calf, like a yoked bull.

The old woman with the keen blue eyes, and the face that had once been fair, looked with the rest, and though she was an honest woman, law-abiding, God-fearing, her heart also was heavy for this hawk of the hills that for ever was caged.

She had been a woman of many sorrows, to whom death had been unkind, and a little son of her dead daughter's had been all that had been left to her of the children of her blood. And one day the little lad had been lost, going with his goats on the high passes above the Albegna valley, and there had been found by the dread Saturnino, asleep, and frozen, where the snows were deep, and Saturnino, who never hurt the poor, had taken him up in his arms and carried him to his own lair miles away, and there fed and tended him, and next day sent him down by one of his own men into his native village safe and sound, and with twenty broad gold pieces in his little woollen breeches.

She, being a brave woman and a holy one, no sooner found her one lost lamb thus than she took the most precious thing she had, an image of Our Lady, that had been blessed by God's Vicegerent, and slipped that and the gold coins in her pouch, and said to the mountaineer who had brought her boy, 'Lead me to your chief that I may thank him.'

The man demurred and was afraid, but finally she prevailed, and he took her back

with him, a long and toilsome tramp up into the hills, staying one night at a cabin on the way, and when they started on the morrow blindfolding her eyes that she should not see whither she went.

When the handkerchief was lifted she was in the presence of Saturnino, whose eyes, according to the people's tales, could send out flame and burn up those on whom his rage lighted.

But she was not afraid. She took out of her pouch the holy image and the gold pieces, and she held them both out to him.

'Saturnino,' she said to him, 'I have come up hither to bless you with my own voice, for you have restored to me the only little living thing I have to love, and night and day I will pray to the saints to have you in their holy keeping. And I have brought you the only bit of value that I own—a Madonna that our Holy Father blessed—and do you put it by a string about your throat, and it will keep the thoughts and hopes of heaven with you. But this gold that you gave to my boy I bring you back, because I know too well, alas! alas! how all your gold is gained.'

The men standing around thought that

he would cut her down with a stroke of his sword straight through skull and throat. But he did not harm her. He took the image meekly like a chidden child, and the gold pieces he dashed in the snow.

‘A brave soul!’ he said of her, and she blessed him once more, and kissed his hand that had sent many a one to an untimely death, and took her homeward way again, praying silently that the holy hosts of heaven might be about his steps and win him from his sin.

Since that time, when she had gone up into his very lair, she had not seen Saturnino. Twenty years had gone by. The little boy that he had saved had died of fever—the ghastly fever that walks these shores all summer through like the ghost of dead Etruria.

Twenty years had gone by, and Saturnino, from a young and generous man who, although fierce and terrible, could be merciful and just, had grown year by year a deeper terror, a dreaded name; not to Maremma still, for still he spared the poor, but to the law and state. More murders lay upon his soul than he had time to count; his will, which was unchecked by those

around, and unbridled by any fear of consequence or qualm of conscience, had grown overbearing, intolerant, exacting, and capricious almost to madness.

Amongst his many loves he had conceived a violent passion for the woman whom he had carried off and kept up in his mountain lair by force : that most beautiful Serapia, of whom the stranger waiting for his ransom had been too amorous. Serapia had died, and after her loss all that there had been of any softness in the nature of the man had been burnt out under the fires of his hatred of fate and rebellion against his misery ; he had become a monster of cruelty, having in him the same temper as of old made the tyrants of Padova and Verona and Brescia the scourges of their generation. Even his men had begun to grow disloyal under the iron heel of his unendurable despotism, and the treachery of one of these had delivered him over into the chains of the State at which he had laughed in secure defiance for so long.

Yet the hearts of the folk in Grosseto were sad for his fate, and the old woman with the northern eyes said to her neighbours : ‘ Nay, I am sorry he has been

taken. You remember how he saved my Carlino. Always I have hoped that with time and my prayers Saturnino would some day turn to an honest life.'

'Nay, mother,' said a Pistoiese, 'of a fox never can you make a house-dog. The pity is that such a man had not luck to the end to die of a shot or a sword-thrust out on his own hills.'

The people murmured assent; that would have been fitting enough certainly. But the galleys! For Saturnino to be chained and numbered, set to work with an axe or a spade in dockyard or on highway, cowed with the whip of the overseer, and pointed out like a wild beast to strangers, that seemed hard.

The thought of it made the blood curdle and grow cold in their veins with the fear of that law which could work this miracle.

'If one may not kill the man who covets our *ganza*, what use are powder and shot?' said the men of Grosseto.

Suddenly the old woman of the north put her hand into her pocket, drew out a piece of money, pushed her way to a wine-shop a few yards behind her, bought a

stoup of the best wine, and came out with it. She went straight up to the carabinieri, and said to them :

‘Yon man did me a good turn once. Will you let me give him this to wet his lips? A good man he is not ; but he was good once.’

The guards hesitated. They were not churlish ; they had a lingering sympathy themselves for their prisoner, who had been taken in a snare at the last, after having been the hero of all Maremma twenty-five years and more, since he had been a mere lad when he had first captured a great English milord, and had let him go with only the loss of one ear cut off, in consideration of a ransom of thirty thousand scudi.

Saturnino, sitting with his head erect, and his great black eyes blazing in a scorn he strove to assume, that he might hide the bitter shame at his heart, heard the voice of the woman, and glanced at her.

The carabinier on his right side, relenting, held the wine towards his mouth. The brigand’s hands were tied behind his back, or he would have dashed the pewter cup down. As it was, he would not drink ; but his sombre eyes dwelt on the woman.

‘Let her speak to me,’ he said.

The carabinieri were ill-disposed to obey, but they saw that the crowd was eager and full of pity for Saturnino. They were afraid to irritate, since they had not gagged him; and, after all, a woman could do no harm.

One of them moved, so as to let her in between his horse and that of the captive. He kept the muzzle of the cocked carbine pointed against her; but she was a brave woman; she did not heed that.

‘Drink my wine, Mastarna,’ she said to him, and lifted the cup herself.

‘Is it you, Joconda?’ he said.

But he did not drink.

‘It is Joconda,’ she said curtly, ‘How came you in this plight?’

‘I was betrayed,’ said the brigand, while his great despairing eyes flashed as a knife that is raised to kill flashes in the light, and he said it more truthfully than many greater conquered conquerors who excuse their own feebleness and lack of forecast by the plea of treachery. He had been betrayed, and seized as he had sat drinking at sunset at the door of his hut in the hills.

‘Joconda, I saved your lamb,’ he said, after a pause.

‘ You did. You are a butcher ; but you saved my lamb. That is why I am sorry to-day.’

‘ Save my lamb, then.’

‘ Have you one ? ’

‘ I have one that I love. She is Serapia’s child. I loved her mother, and her mother is dead. Go and save her ! ’

‘ Where is she ? ’

‘ Up yonder,’ he answered, with a backward gesture of his head to where, in the haze of the far distance, the snowy hills of his own lair lay. ‘ Any one will tell you on the hills. Ask for the Rocca del Giulio. They seized me ; my men fought, but they killed them. She was with women ; but they may have fled. Will you find her, and bring her up in your house ? ’

The face of the old woman grew weary and perplexed.

‘ It will be a burden, Mastarna.’

‘ Ay, it will. Do as you choose. But she is little and alone.’

The woman paused and mused.

‘ I will take her if I can find her,’ she said at length.

Across the bold, sombre, fierce face of the fettered man a strong emotion swept.

‘Lift your wine to my mouth,’ he said.
‘I will drink it now.’

And he drank.

‘Loosen the image from my hat. She has the same about her throat ; her mother hung them both. I have your Madonnina still at mine,’ he muttered, when he had drained the cup.

She put one foot on the stirrup, for she was strong and active, though old ; loosened the golden image, and detached it from its place. At that moment the officer in charge of the escort, arriving in haste, reproved his men in fury, and the horses started so suddenly that she could scarcely save herself from falling between their legs and being trampled to pieces on the stones.

By good fortune she escaped injury, and only fell on her knees, and rose again unhurt. The troop of carabinieri were trotting out of the square, their carbines pointed at the head of Saturnino.

They soon vanished in the golden haze of the rising sun.

A hundred hands were stretched to touch her ; a hundred questions rained on her ear.

‘What did Saturnino tell you, mother ?’
cried the Grosseto folk jealously, for they

had been so kept at musket's length by the guards that no one had heard a syllable of what had been said.

‘I knew him years ago,’ she answered, ‘and he bade me hang this image in some chapel, that Our Lady may have grace to him. Nay, hands off; it shall go where he told me. And he whom you call your Saturnino needs heaven’s mercy sorely; for he was a murderer many times—many times.’

For these were her foolish notions, she being a woman from the north.

More they could not get out of her. She carried the empty wine-cup back to the wine-shop, and then made her way quietly out of the square by a narrow lane.

The people stood about in a silent, sad, sullen mob; discomfited and dissatisfied with themselves that they had not struck a blow for their hero.

Saturnino Mastarna had been a robber; and, as she had justly said, a murderer many times. He had swooped down on the lonely mountain paths above the mountain-born Fiora, and along the once consular and imperial highway that runs through Orbetello and Civita Vecchia to Rome, even as the pseudætus eagle of these hills swoops down

from his cliff-nest, made of oak leaves and olive boughs, on to the water-fowls of the pools, until the daring and the frequency of his captures had made his name a household word that had rung far and wide beyond the confines of Maremma.

Therefore Maremma had been proud of him; proud in a fierce, defiant way that had given him many a nameless ally amidst the scattered gentry of all that wild and lonesome country, and even here in old grave Grosseto, a score of miles away from the foaming waters of the Fiora, people had felt the same pride in him, and now, as the trot of the horses and the clangour of weapons died away into silence, there were regret and a smothered rage in the populace to think that their hero should have been brought through their streets with his feet tied under the belly of his horse, to go to the galleys of Gorgona or the salt mines of Sardinia, and be no more seen of men, although for years and years to come the story of his exploits would be told from mouth to mouth wherever a group of woodmen sat about the forest fires at night, or a couple of fishermen wiled the becalmed day away with talk, or in the winter evenings in farmhouses far

away on the Lucchese hills men and maidens munched the chestnuts with white teeth.

A great stillness and gloom fell on the populace, and the tongues of the people for once ceased to buzz and scream, and were only heard in a few rebellious mutterings against the State, which took a frank free-booter like a rat in a trap and dealt with him as it dealt with any paltry thief of the cities. Saturnino was gone: a dead man, or worse than a dead man, and never more would his native Maremma thrill with the Homeric tales of his acts; never more would this town of Grosseto see him stride through their public places with his pistols and knife in his broad red sash, and his bold black eyes full of challenge and scorn.

It was all over, like wine spilt on the ground; henceforth the Maremma would speak of him only with bated breath, and memories half glorious, half sad, like the memories of dead heroes. Saturnino Mastarna was gone; seized by the impalpable, far-reaching, spectral arm of the law, which to a rustic and simple people is so vaguely terrible, so unjust, so incomprehensible, coming out, as it seems to them to do, from the infinite

and the unknown to seize them for their secret sins.

He was gone, and there was little mirth in Grosseto that day, though usually the October weeks are full of merriment and business, of song and dance, of bargains made, and of wine drunk, and of gladness at the coming winter, and of sportive love offered and returned. But this day the crowds were dull and vexed, and looking in each other's faces read one unspoken thought there, common to all :—

‘ We should have rescued him ! ’



CHAPTER II.

MEANWHILE Joconda Romanelli, the woman who had had the courage to speak a bold word for his sake, left the town to itself and prepared to return on her homeward way to her village of Santa Tarsilla, a long way off upon the coast, a low-lying sickly sea-shore place.

Twice a year regularly she yoked her mule to her cart and drove into Grosseto, making a two days' journey on the road each way, on purpose to sell the homespun linen she had woven from thread she had spun in the six months' time. She knew a hosier in Grosseto who only sold '*nostrali*' linen, and gave her a fair price for hers at spring and autumn. She thought him honester than Orbetello folk, so made the longer drive across the wild and lonely country.

She went now to the tavern where she had slept, and where her mule was put up, harnessed him with her own hands, and drove out of the city gates with her hard-earned gains in a bag amongst the hay and straw at her feet.

She went over the flat desolate lands that lie cheerlessly and barrenly about Grosseto, past the lime quarries of Alberese, over the narrow ill-made roads that traverse the marshes, and over the rivers by ford or ferry or bridge, and underneath hills dark with forest where the buck and the boar roamed at liberty. She drove as long as it was light, then reached a miserable little inn, but a friendly one, and slept there; then at dawn resumed her homeward way.

She drove on and on, the old mule ambling slowly, for he only had long journeys twice a year, and resented them mournfully; the moss and the marshes, the wide fields lying red and bare for the plough, and the little knots of pale dust-coloured houses that made the villages of the hill-sides, were passed in succession until she got across country and down to the level of the sea, and saw little else save stunted aloes and sand, though the distance was dark with

the outskirts of the retreating Apennines, and the woods upon the Giglio island rose up in sight.

When she could see the isle she had reached her home, an old house of stone and oak timber standing near the wharf of the small township of Santa Tarsilla, on a little bay, that scholars affirmed had once been, like its neighbours Telamone and Populonia, a port of those sea-kings, the Etruscans.

In this little bay some small traffic in fish, and in the stone and charcoal from inland, kept the little place from absolute stagnation and death ; but in the summer nearly all its few souls fled away, and in summer no coasting smack cared to lie by its little quay.

For it was full of miasma and fever in the hot season, like all these places on the low Maremma coast ; even now in the late days of October the fever mists still hung about it, the pools and the beach still sent out noxious vapours, the scanty population sat about listless and shivering, the children lay on the sand too weak to care to play, and there were but two or three of them in all the place ; a few fishermen were out upon the shore, a coastguardsman paced to and fro, a

little vessel was shipping grain, anchored amongst the mud-choked shoals : that was all.

It was a dreary place at the best of times ; antiquaries said that the sea had receded nearly a mile since the days when the Etruscan pirates had sailed from that bay, and Etruscan lucomonies had had their fortresses and their tombs away yonder where the shore line grew dusky with thickets of bay and rosemary and the prickly *marucca*, or holy thorn,¹ so common here.

‘ You are safe home, mother ? ’ said the pallid women, as the mule of Joconda picked his way amidst the stones and sand to his own house door.

‘ Aye, the saints be praised, ’ said Joconda, and said no more.

They knew the woman of Savoy never chattered, and that it was useless to ask from her gossip of Grosseto until she had stabled her beast and broken her fast, and of not very much use after that. Joconda went on to her own dwelling ; it was all of stone with a roof of red tiles ; it was old and spacious, and had pointed casements and a massive oak door ; her living-room and her bed-chamber were all the rooms she used ;

¹ *Paliurus australis*.

the next room she had given to her mule and her poultry, and a fine black pig. The floors were of stone, and the ceilings too ; there was an open hearth that served her for cooking ; the hearth now was cold.

She first put her money into a secret place, stabled her mule, counted her fowls, to be sure none were stolen, and then lit a little fire and put on a pot of vegetable soup. Then she sat down and thought while her frugal supper was simmering.

She did not tell anyone of what she had seen, and heard, and promised in Grosseto. She was not a sociable woman, and she had only neighbours, no friends.

Joconda Romanelli had been taciturn and grave for forty years ; ever since one summer day, when her man had gone down in a white squall, like that which wrecked Shelley. She had loved the man, and had been sternly faithful to him and to the offspring he had left her. She had always got her own living by carrying cargo to the coasters for her husband's comrades, and taking her linen into Grosseto ; in bad weather she sat at home and spun, or made fishing nets and sewed sails. She was

active and very hardy; she lived honestly, and in a stern, cleanly fashion that made her village people think her odd and be a little afraid of her. Her sons had died of the marsh fever and her daughter had left her a motherless grandson, a bold fair boy, the lamb that Saturnino had saved ten years before when the boy had gone up with his goats into the mountains; for which mercy Joconda and her lad had blessed him every day and night they told their beads.

But though Saturnino had spared the boy, the fever had not done so; and ever since his death Joconda had dwelt alone with her dead memories. She had been a sad woman always, but she was a strong one. She worked for her living, and owed nobody a bronze piece, and was half respected and half feared, which she liked better than being loved.

Fifty years before she had been brought here from her mountain home fronting the high chain of the Grand Paradis by her husband after a fishing cruise to the seaboard of lower Savoy, and the tradition of her northern birth made her still 'a stranger' to the people of Santa Tarsilla and all the low-lying shore. She had never seen Savoy for

nigh fifty years, but she was 'the woman of Savoy' to them all.

It had been a fatal day for her when her mother's sister, a farmer's wife near S. Martin Lantosque, had lost her cows one by one by disease, and sent to beg that her niece, who was so skilled in dairy matters, would go and spend a summer with her; and in the course of that summer, up at Lantosque, to visit mountain neighbours, there had come some seafaring men from Villafranca, away on the seaboard, and amongst them had been a man of Maremma, Sostegno Romanelli, the owner of a tartana then lying off the shores of Savoy. He had been a handsome young man, and at that time well-to-do as a coaster; he had persuaded the blue-eyed maiden from the green alps above the Val de Cogne to give a favourable answer to his wooing. She and he had been wedded that same summer at the little church of S. Martin, and she had gone to live with him at his native Maremmana town.

Things had done very well with them awhile; then turned and went as ill. The tartana had to be sold, and its owner had to become a deep-water fisherman, working for the gain of others. His wife, ashamed of

their troubles, which her own people had predicted, ceased to write to the chalet under the arolla forests.

They were homely people there on the pine-clad heights above Cogne, but there was always a homely plenty, and no penury touched them. They were good-hearted, but hard of mind and scanty in sympathy. She could never bring herself to tell them that she had married into poverty, and was sick to death of this fatal shore to which her Maremmano had brought her. So silence fell between her and her own family, and up on the mountain slopes that faced the Grand Paradis her brothers and sisters ceased to remember and ceased to regret her.

She slept a little now over her supper, being weary; she was woke by neighbours' voices; women were looking in at her window and tapping at it, being unable any longer to subdue their eagerness for news.

'Is it true that Saturnino has been taken, good mother?' they asked her.

'Ay, ay, why not?' she answered crossly. 'He has been taken.'

'Did you see him in Grosseto?'

'Yes, the poor soul! with his legs tied under the horse's belly.'

‘Oh, the hard pity of it!’ mourned the gossips with a wail.

‘He has got his deserts,’ said Joconda. ‘A fine long time he has been loose on these hills. Luck always changes.’

‘It was that foreign man that made the fuss,’ the women muttered. ‘He must have been some great prince, else never would they have captured Saturnino for his misfortune.’

‘Misfortune’ was their fine way of speaking; they knew well that the traveller had been foully murdered.

‘He killed the foreigner,’ said Joconda curtly. ‘He had killed scores. That one was the one too much. That was all.’

The women at the window muttered that this was just the caprice and injustice of the government and the soldiers; a murder more or less (if it were a murder), did it matter so much? Saturnino was a fine bold man, and never had harmed the poor.

‘Why, he had good about him,’ assented Joconda. ‘But murder is not a good thing; I wish he had had other ways of living. Alas! poor soul! upon that rock of Gorgona his crimes will be cold comfort to him.’

‘And that is true,’ said the gossips, crossing themselves; ‘did you speak to him, mother? Was there any chance to say a word?’

‘Yes; I spoke to him.’

‘What did he say to you?’

‘He reminded me of my dead lamb, and I told him I had not forgot my debt.’

‘Was that all?’

‘Yes; get you to your beds; I want to get to mine.’

And she nodded to them, and shut her latticed casement behind its wire grating, and shut out the sight of the moonlit sea, and the shining sands that hid her dead. She heard them under her house wall on the edge of the beach, for the night was still young, talking still of the hero of the hills and of his fate. She heard the deeper tones of a man’s voice strike across theirs and say:

‘No bolder soul ever lived than Saturnino Mastarna. They have taken him, and they will cage him out on Gorgona yonder, or send him to the King’s mines. If man could free him, I would free him. What did he do ever? Did he steal from the poor? No. Did he rob the church? No. Did ever a peasant miss his sheep, or a woodman

his wallet; or a labourer that had got his wages in his waistband, was he ever lightened of them by Saturnino? Nay, never. That we know. We have come and gone on his mountains and never were we the worse. When old Montino was lost in the snow on Santa Fiora, what did Mastarna do when he found him? Took him to his own hut, and warmed, and fed him, and gave him of the best, and when he saw that old Montino had a bag of gold pieces with him, said to him, "Fear nothing; neither I nor my men will touch your gold, because you are an old man and a steward, and the loss would get you blamed by your masters, maybe thrown in prison." And when full day came, he himself took Montino down the mountain as far as the first ford that crosses the Fiora. Five hundred times, if once, have I heard the history from Montino himself. Nay, Saturnino was a brave man, and a generous, and because he aided this stranger to escape from the burden of life, they have caged him in a trap as you catch a dondola. It is vile. The stranger was a rich man in his own country, a great prince, they say; what did he do here in Italy? why not stay where he was? It was always the rich that Mastarna

made war on ; the poor were sacred to him. That we know. Yet he will lie in chains amidst the waves on Gorgona, or waste his strength in the mines in the bowels of the earth. It is unjust. It is unjust.'

Then an assenting and approving murmur rose up from the listening people and joined with the murmur of the sea.

Joconda heard them as she lay on her hard straw bed.

'And there is a grain of truth in what they say,' she thought. 'Yet his sins were many and deep, poor soul ! and they will be heavier about his neck than the chains he will wear on Gorgona. May Christ lighten them !'

Then she slept.

She was a woman who usually enjoyed the dreamless, heavy sleep of the hard worker ; but all through this night she dreamed and saw the bold form of Saturnino chained, and with his crimes written on his breast for any who chose to read, even as he would be henceforth in all his years to come on the sunburnt, wave-beaten rock : the eagle of the mountains fettered to a stone in the sea.

At daybreak her mind was made up ;

she took a stout staff in her hand, slung her wallet about her, with some bread in it and some goat's ham cured Savoy fashion, and went out towards the mountains.

She was a strong woman, though old, and she walked briskly. The pasture lands and marshes were desolate, and she met scarce anyone ; here and there a furze cutter or a ploughman with his oxen, that was all. She soon quitted the sight of the sea, and bore inland by the course of the Albegna river, through solitary untracked thickets, and over rough rocky ground.

After some hours she came to cross roads, and there sat down on a stone, and waited for the public waggon running from Orbetello to Monte Murano to come by ; when it jolted near her, its miserable horses straining at their rope harness, she stopped it, and got into it ; it lumbered on under a volley of blows and oaths rained on the patient, sinking beasts.

At Monte Murano she descended, and was forced to sleep ; with daybreak she left the place, and thence had to make her way as best she might up to what had been the brigand's favourite lair, although he had others in the fastnesses of the Ciminian

mountains, which he frequented when it pleased him to descend upon the southward road nearer Rome, where more than once he had even stopped the mail train itself as it had rolled over the marshes and beneath the sombre gloom of the maritime pines, and had swerved off the line as it encountered the timber and stones that Saturnino's men had placed there in its path.

He had been always called Saturnino of the Santa Fiora, though his range had extended so much farther than these peaks, and towards Santa Fiora she made her way through the dense underwood and luxuriant vegetation that here cover the soil, where the roads are mere mule tracks, often effaced, and the amphitheatre of the mountains enclose a solitude and a silence scarcely ever broken save by sound of sheep-bell, or cry of bittern, or the browsing murmur of the teeth of wild cattle chewing the luscious grass.

Here on the wooded cliffs was once Saturnia, whose giant walls still remain, overgrown with laurestinus and mountain box and butcher's broom, and in the hovels that occupy its site, and take its name, where Saturnino forty-five years be-

fore had seen the light, there is a filthy little drinking-house, whose only customers are the shepherds and the woodcutters and the muleteers.

There Mastarna, as the hero and martyr of the soil, was being lamented by a knot of ill-looking foresters as Joconda passed the open door by which they were sitting together playing at dominoes. Being a brave woman, and not caring for their ill looks, she gathered from them what direction to take so as to reach the mountain crest without sinking miserably in a quagmire, or wandering till dead of hunger in the intricacy of the pathless jungle.

She asked for the Rocca del Giulio, and they pointed it to her; far, very far away, where the autumn snows lay on the highest lines of the hills. She took her staff and wallet and set out again.

‘You cannot reach it to-night, mother,’ the men said to her.

She said to them, ‘Very well. No one will hurt me. I am old and ugly, and I have not a coin to steal.’

They laughed and asked her why she went; she told them ‘to get a child to nurse;’ and with the prudence of her country

appended to the fact a fiction of a daughter whose infant was dead, and who needed one to suckle.

‘A little lie is always useful,’ thought Joconda, though she was not a false or a faithless woman.

Then she lost sight of the foaming, turbulent Fiora, and began her climb towards the mountain summits. The ways were very steep and very long ; night overtook her. She took shelter in an empty hut of a shepherd, and ate and drank out of her wallet, and slept not ill, for she was tired and not timorous.

The great lonely mountain-side, with the water freshets of autumn tearing down it to swell the Fiora water, was about her when she awoke. She could not see the rock she wanted above her, a grey speck under the snows. She was stiff, and felt as if she were frozen from sleeping out of her bed on the damp leaves ; but she resumed her upward way. It was again noon when she passed the last robur-oak and cork trees and came up amidst wind-wasted pines and boulders of granite and slate, tossed about on a wild mountain scarp; as if in the horse-play of giants.

She saw scarce any one ; the scattered folk of the hills were most of them in hiding, stricken with terror at the seizure of Saturnino, with whom they were all in habits of greater or lesser complicity.

One old man was met with, very old and bent. He was looking for simples in the many herbs that clothed the hillside. He told her at last where the Rocca del Giulio was, pointing, as he spoke, to a spot far away amidst the snow that had fallen on the heights.

‘ That was Saturnino’s nest,’ he said. ‘ Poor soul ! They have taken him, and killed most of his men. He never did me any harm.’

He was very old, and not curious ; being so, he let her go on upward without question.

Here the snow had fallen heavily. It had ceased to fall now, but there was a sharp frost on these heights, and the ground was white and hard. The stunted trees looked black. It was very desolate. The clouds were low upon the mountain side, and their mists were all around her. She could see the white crests of the Labbro and the Santa Fiora loom close on her, it seemed, in the steel-hued fog. She had never been so high

up on the mountains since her girlhood, sixty and more years before in the alps about the feet of the Becca di Nona. The sight of the great cones of snow so near beside her, the feeling of the crisp clear air and the icy freshness of it, gave her a strange sensation—the sickness of *nostalgia* coming on her in old age, after a long life in the swamps and on the shore.

A sudden thirst made her throat and her heart ache with longing for her old home, set on a granite ledge of rock, with the valley of Cogne stretching below it, and the white summit of Mont Blanc in sight beyond the gorge, and nearer at hand the peaks and glaciers of the Grand Paradis, her old home, with its girdle of deep green forest, and its ceaseless sound of rushing water, and its alpine winds, that are known no more to the dwellers of the plains than what the condor of the Andes beholds in its flight is known to the hedge-sparrow in the thorn-bush by the road.

It was sixty long years since she had felt that wind upon her forehead, and heard that rush of ice-fed waters as they leapt from rock to rock ; since she had lifted her voice in the *jödel* of the hills, and rested

her eyes on that fresh flowering grass, those deep cool shadows of the pines. Yet now and then it all came back upon her as it did now, clear as a dream of the night, and then the sea would fade away, and the sands recede, and the misty scorching dust-grey shores grow dim to her, and her eyes would only be dry because she had grown too old to weep. And when she slept, it was of these she dreamed almost always; above all, in the stifling midnights of the terrible canicular heat, when the air was like steam, and the soil was like brass, and there was no freshness or peace in the darkness, and with its fall no dews.

She felt for the brigand's image in her bosom, and drew it out and looked at it; then walked to the first house that lay in her way.

They seemed all empty. There was not a sound, except the sougling of wind in the tops of the pines.

She called, and no one answered. She shouted again and again, but her voice died on the mountain stillness unanswered. Then she pushed open a door and looked inside. The houses were little more than stone huts, and they were all deserted; hastily

deserted, it seemed to her ; for there were things strewn about them, and here and there pools of blood, and broken arms upon the frozen snow. She could have guessed how it had been, even had she known nothing of the capture of Saturnino ; guessed that there had been a struggle here, and the women had left in hurried flight.

‘ How shall I find his lamb ? ’ she thought, with a sigh half of regret, half of relief ; and she stood still and looked.

The few people who had dwelt there had fled, that was plain to her ; most likely out of fear of the soldiery.

‘ Poor souls ! ’ she said, and crossed herself, seeing the scarcely dried blood on the stones.

A dog’s bark startled her.

It was a bark of anger and of appeal both in one. She rose and went in the direction of the sound. It came from the last of the stone huts. She pushed open the door as she had done that of the other. A great dog, snow-white, stood in the centre of the clay floor ; under his body was a child asleep.

‘ The child of Serapia ! ’ she thought, as she looked down on the sleeping infant.

Serapia had been but a name—a legend—to the dwellers of the shore and plains.

Wild tales were always told of how Saturnino had ravished her from her people ; people beggared though of noble blood, who dwelt on a wind-swept spur of the Sabine hills, by whom she was cursed, and looked on as one dead.

A beautiful, ignorant, mindless thing she had ever been ; foolish and passionate from the hour that she had been borne away, a second Proserpine, to the night of oblivion, peril, and crime in which her brute-lover dwelt. One short year only she had been carried, half a captive, half a willing mistress, to that topmost haunt of the hills where all that Saturnino knew as home was made. There she had died ; some said of fever, some said of a blow from Saturnino ; anyway she had died, and had been buried where the tall stone pines rose up like columns of a temple against the marble of the porches. And her child was here, asleep amidst a scene of carnage made more horrible by the dreaming smile of a baby's rest.

In the cabin there were loose coins, gold, and jewels, dropped and stamped on as they had been caught up in the haste of

flight ; a rich shawl was thrown aside upon the beaten earth of the ground, a length of gold brocade was tossed against a rough-hewn table, overturned ; close to the child's bed there was a carved ivory toy such as are made in India. In the child's hand was a dry half-eaten crust.

Joconda looked neither to the gold nor stuffs. Her soul was sick at the sight of the pools of blood still wet, and at the sight of the dreaming creature who was left a heritage of crime and woe.

'The blood of Saturnino !' she thought ; it seemed to her that it must be as a stream of lava and of poison in the veins of a female child.

'This must be the child,' said Joconda to herself, and stood looking ; she was afraid of the white Molossus dog.

The child was two years of age, or two and a half, she thought ; not more. It had been forsaken, no doubt, when the mistresses and wives of the band had run for their lives after the men's struggle with the carabinieri.

Joconda stood wavering, on account of the dog ; at length she spoke to him, and he looked at her. Then he ceased to growl,

and smelt her. Then, apparently satisfied, he let her draw near the child, who was sleeping : a lovely creature, half naked, with long black lashes lying on cheeks like mountain rose-leaves, and loose thick curls like rings of amber.

‘It is a woman child ; so much the worse,’ said Joconda, looking down on it.

If it had been a male, it would have been much easier for her ; a boy could soon have run about and done something for his daily bread in the boats, or with the mules, or in the firewoods. However, she remembered that, be it what it would, she had promised Mastarna. She looked timorously at the dog, and raised the child without waking it ; he looked at her in return, watchfully, but comprehending that she meant it no injury. She saw at the baby’s throat a little golden image ; then she wrapped her shawl about it, and said to the dog ‘Come.’

For the dog was alone, and Joconda was a woman of hard aspect but good heart.

The dog was of the same race as Ulysses’ faithful friend, perhaps the purest and most ancient canine race of all in the world, and one of the boldest and most

beautiful; he was fierce and powerful, but full of sympathy and wisdom; he bent his head, sniffed at her feet, gazed sorrowfully in her eyes, put his nose to the child's cheek, then went with her down the path by which she had climbed to what had been, until the night before, the brigand's home.

She began to descend the mountain, but night drew nigh, and the child, who still slept, was a heavy weight. She stopped at the first cabin she came to, and asked for shelter. The charcoal-burners, who dwelt there, knew the look of the child and the dog, and would not take her in; they were afraid Saturnino's daughter might bring them trouble with the police. Joconda cursed them heartily for cowards.

She made her way with great fatigue, and with strong effort managed to reach the inn where she had slept the first night. Here they did not know the child nor the dog, or did not say that they did.

'Ah! thou hast got the baby for thy step-daughter,' was all the woman of the house said to her; and Joconda answered—

'Ay; but it has ceased to suck; that is a pity.'

Long before this the child had wakened

more than once, and had cried and sobbed, and become very troublesome. The dog was quiet and sad.

They gave her goat's milk and black bread, and let her and the child and the dog sleep altogether in a room full of hay and straw. She and the baby slept well; the dog but little.

The following morning she resumed her journey, and returned as she had come, only that she had the burden of the infant and the companionship of the animal.

The child was now wakeful, impatient, tyrannous; the dog, as he got farther and farther from his old home, was melancholy, and footsore, and anxious.

'You are like a white lion,' she said to him, and named him Leone: what names either he or the child had borne before she could not tell.

It was still fresh, fine weather, happily for her, for she had to walk much, and it took her several days to return on foot, and the diligence only ran once a week, and she missed it at Monte Murano. She was an old woman, and she became very weary.

It was evening once more when she drew nigh her own village.

The pale sands, the tufa rocks, the background of marshes and stagnant water looked very dreary even to her who had been used to them all her life ; there was a sickly haze upon the sea, and a fog upon the horizon.

Two or three of her neighbours, wasted and wan-looking folks, gave her good evening, and glanced at the child and the dog.

‘Is that child of thy kin, mother?’ they asked curiously.

‘Nay ; I have no kin here. It is a dead friend’s child,’ she answered them wearily, for she was very tired.

‘And the dog?’

‘He was my dead friend’s dog ; he followed me. I could not turn him adrift.’

‘They will be hungry mouths, mother?’

‘Ay ; but I will not ask you to feed them.’

Then they laughed and stared and wondered, but dared not ask more, and let her be.

She made her way to her own house, and drew the great key from her girdle, and unlocked her door and opened it, and entered, leading the child by the hand, and followed by the dog.

It was cold and dark and cheerless. The child was awed, and the dog dulled, by the stillness and solitude, the greyness and gloom. The sound of the sea breaking on the sands below was more mournful than perfect silence.

Joconda kneeled down by the crucifix that hung on the wall and made the little limbs of the baby kneel too.

‘See me, good saints, and bear ye testimony that I have kept my word. Be this young thing blessing or curse, I have kept my word. Be ye good to us both.’

Then she rose and fetched from her closets water and milk, salted fish and bread, and broke her fast, and gave food and drink to both the child and the beast.

When she went to rest, the rosy and fresh-washed warmth of the child was on her rough couch, and the white Molossus was stretched before her door. She could not tell whether she were sorry or content. She was at least no longer alone.

‘But the blood of Saturnino?’ she said doubtfully to herself. Any way, she had kept her word.

As she had stumbled down along the stony mountain road, the weight of the two-

year-old child heavy on her shoulder, she, being a religious woman, had bethought her that surely it had never been baptised, and pondered on what holy name to give to this offspring of sinners.

She knew her calendar by heart, and called to mind that this autumnal day, with the deep white snow on the heights, and the red and gold ash-foliage in the woods, was the twenty-ninth of October, the day dedicated by the Latin Church to that sad and little remembered eastern saint, Mary the Penitent.

Joconda was not a book-learned woman. She could spell out her missal, that was all; but she vaguely remembered that Santa Maria Penitente had had the grace of heaven given her after sorrow and shame, and that in her story there was a dragon who devoured a dove, and out of the body of the monster the beautiful white bird had come forth unharmed and spread its wings, and shot upward to the sun. And for sure this is a dove come forth from a dragon, she had said to herself, looking at the sleeping child, and so had resolved that when she should get down back to her own little town, the child should be received into the Church by the name of Maria Penitente and no other,



CHAPTER III.

SANTA TARSILLA was a dreary place midway between Telamone and Orbetello, lying low upon a shore half sand, half swamp, with aloes and sea fennel and the prickly samphire for all its vegetation, and blocks of stone and marble strewn about, some Roman, some Etruscan. There was beauty indeed on its horizon, in the luminous air where the distant snow-peaks of Corsica and the near crags of iron-bound Elba could be seen, with far Capraja and Monte Cristo, and many another island nameless to the world. But to see these it was needful to go a good way out upon the open water; from the little crooked land-locked bay there was little to be discerned save the low pale coast and low red tufa hills that locked in

the harbour, where the waters were shallow, turgid, almost stagnant, choked with weed and sand, although, beyond, the Ligurian sea, blue as turquoise in some lights, blue as lapis lazuli at others, sometimes rose in fretted turbulence, and sometimes rolled in a sullen swell.

A little way inland the moors began ; in grand level stretches of gorse and brushwood, covering many a buried tomb, and buried town, with the lentiscus and the rosemary waving above them. Nigh at hand were dark lines of pine forests, although their balsamic scent and resinous breath could not purify the miasma of the coast, and eastward were the still wild and scarce-trodden woodlands, stretching away to the mountain-ranges where the robber had made his lair. But wood and hill were all too far away to alter the weary monotony of the scene at Santa Tarsilla. It seemed all shore—pale barren shore ; and shallow sea—sea which yet drowned so many that it seemed to the people like a graveyard.

On a narrow tongue of sandy land there was a little fort ; sickly soldiers came there and guards to watch the coast. There was also a furnace-house to make the salt that was

raked upon the beach ; but smoke seldom issued from its chimney, though wood was to be had for the getting, and salt for the taking of it. The people had little strength and less spirit. In winter time their lives were very hard, and with the summer came the pestilence, and then ague and fever fed on them and drained their bodies, and left them scanty force to do more than sit in the shade of their boats or their walls and push out for moonlit fishing when night fell. It was the strong fellows who came down from the mountains of Pistoija and the hills of Lucca that did their work, and reaped the harvest on moor and in forest when autumn came round.

The people of the shore were nearly all dropsical, and the few soldiers and coast-guardsmen sent on duty along the shores suffered more than the native population at most times. But the Pistoiese and the Lucchese and the armies of winter-workers did not come into Santa Tarsilla itself except at rare odd times, when some of them brought, from the interior, grain or timber or charcoal to load the little coasters that were the only vessels insignificant enough to deign to remember this secluded little bay ; and even to

these the port dues were so heavy as to be well nigh ruinous, and the skippers, poor men of Livorno and Genoa for the most part, were scarcely able to scrape a profit from their cargoes. The port dues and shipping taxes have crippled and nearly destroyed all the commerce of the minor merchantmen of Italy, and they have struck a death-blow to the humble industries of the little Maremano sea-towns.

Before the independence, of which the Maremma heard much but understood little, Santa Tarsilla had been very feeble, but able to get its own living; since then it had become paralysed, and was perishing off the face of the earth.

The waters teemed with fish; only looking down from the side of a boat you could see fish, by the thousand, gleaming like gold and silver in those bright transparent depths, with the feathery weeds, and the branches of coral. There was always fish indeed; but fish, though it will serve to fill your own mouth, and the mouths of your children, is of very little further use unless there be buyers for it. The waters teemed, the nets ran over, but as often as not the living spoils of the sea were thrown down and

left to rot in noisome heaps upon the sands, because there was no one to purchase them and no means to carry them to other towns. Now and then they took the fish on mules to Grosseto or other places on the line of rail, but there was little sale for it ; and before it could be passed through the gates of any town there was so heavy a tax on it that it paid no one to load a felucca's deck or a beast's panniers with so perishable a thing.

So Santa Tarsilla was sad and solitary always, and usually sickly enough ; there was never any mirth or joviality in it ; the young men grew impatient of its loneliness and poverty, and always went away as soon as they reached years enough to be their own masters. There were only a few old men, and some women and children ; all the stronger folk who had been born in it were elsewhere, coral fishing in the south, doing forest work on the hills, or gone to live at Follonica where the foundries are.

Only the feeble, the old, and the very poor stayed in the little bay that had once been a great port for the galleys of Porsenna, as Joconda did, who had neither means nor strength to move away to a cooler land.

An almost absolute silence reigned there, only broken by the booming of millions of mosquitoes, and the tinkling now and then of the one feeble church bell. The many pedlars that travel through Maremma did not very often give an hour to Santa Tarsilla, unless their way lay most directly over the Tombolo or sandy shore. Now and then one came with needles and pins, tapes and kerchiefs, and a hundred other small articles of merchandise, packed in the wooden or leathern case upon his back ; and when he did come, there was much gossip but few pence for him, for every one was poor in the forlorn forgotten town, which would have been no more than a village had it not been for its coastguard and its church.

By June, when the harvest was reaped, the labourers fled ; a few fisher-folk remained, sallow and lean with weakness, or swollen with the dropsy common to the coast. Its very priests were sent to Santa Tarsilla as a penitence ; and its military were stationed as a chastisement ; of late years, even the little garrison of soldiers had been withdrawn by the Government, and there were none nearer than Orbetello. The little fort was falling to decay, and even the coastguards-

men dwelt not at Santa Tarsilla itself, but in a tower on the coast a mile away.

Nothing could be sadder than this place, or seem more forgotten of God and man.

Joconda sometimes, sitting at her door in the heavy parching summer heats, thought with a dull agony of remembrance of the mountain home of her birth.

In these unhealthy places of Maremma, where no one ever stays who can get away, and nearly all who remain are ague-stricken and fever-worn, young children not seldom thrive well enough. The poisoned air, so hot, so damp, so laden with seeds of disease, seems to have mercy sometimes on these young open lips, and bare, soft, uncertain limbs, and in six years' time from the capture of the brigand of Santa Fiora, there was the lithe figure of a beautiful child, bright as a rose, erect as a palm, on the pallid sands under the sultry skies.

This child that was Saturnino's throve, and grew without ailment, without accident, without a flaw anywhere, in feature, or limb, or body.

When Joconda had come down the hills with the weight of Saturnino's legacy in her arms, she had pondered long and anxiously

as to whether she would tell the people of Santa Tarsilla that it was the daughter of their hero whom she was about to take beneath her roof. She had turned the matter over long and anxiously in her thoughts, as the public waggon had rumbled on its way down the long stony roads, and at length had decided with herself not to let them know it. Joconda was a woman more truthful than the rest; that is to say, she saw no harm whatever in an untruth if it were necessary and injured nobody, a distinction that in Italy is rarely drawn; but she did not think a lie the natural answer to, and legitimate offspring of, a question, as most of her neighbours did, and she preferred to tell the simple truth when she could, which is esteemed in the country generally as but poor dull work, showing great lack of invention in whosoever is content with it.

At last, as she had lain the night through wide awake, disturbed by the presence and the thought of Saturnino's offspring, she had resolved that it would be best not to tell the truth here. The people would make an idol of their hero's offspring, and the child, as she grew older, would be restless and perturbed if she heard that her

father had been sent by his judges to pass his life as a galley-slave on Gorgona.

Joconda feared no scorn and unkindness on the score of her birth for the child, if that birth were known; on the contrary, she feared the vanity and the evil passions that, with the knowledge of the blood of the Mastarna in her veins, might by public sentiment be engendered in her.

She would be the child of a hero, almost of a martyr, in the esteem of Maremma. She would hear no account made of his crimes; she would only hear of his valour; and if she lived she would grow up to think of her father as a sufferer by the law's injustice.

To the cooler, sturdier, northern sense of right and wrong which abode in the mountain-born spirit of the woman of Savoy, this prospect carried a fatal future to give to any child; and she resolved within herself to keep the secret of the baby's paternity from all, save, of course, her confessor. To him she told the truth.

To the rest of the shore people she said merely that it was a friend's child come from over the other side of Monte Labbro, and she, being a close and resolute woman, was

impenetrable to the curiosity of her neighbours.

They were not very curious either.

A child was no rare treasure, and there was nothing strange in a lone one being placed with a lone woman who was known to have a little money secured and hidden somewhere. Plenty of people along the coast would have been willing and glad to let Joconda adopt their children, would she have taken them. So without more comment or inquiry the child and the dog were domiciled at the old stone house by the pier in Santa Tarsilla, and there grew and throve, as they best might, in an air that to many was death.

Joconda's first care was to have her friend and director, the priest, baptise the infant, and wash away in holy water the sins of its fathers from its soul. She knew not what it had ever been called, or if it had ever been called anything, but the name of the saint on whose day she had found it, she gave to it, as on the mountain side she had resolved to do. By the sad recluse of Syria the little large-eyed rose-cheeked child of Saturnino and Serapia was named, and Joconda saw a storm-swallow fly beyond

the grated casement of the church, and said to herself that it was a dove. She was not a superstitious woman, but still, if such things once had been, why not again?

‘She is a love child?’ said the sacristan, as he gave her back to Joconda’s arms, weighted henceforward with the name of the Syrian Magdalene. ‘A child of crime,’ said Joconda; for she had not the indulgence to the sins of Saturnino Mastarna that the Maremma had. She was a northern woman.

When the old priest died a dozen years later on, Joconda did not tell his successor of the child’s parentage.

‘They are good as good can be, the holy men,’ she said to herself, ‘and of course they never tell anything out of confessional—no—but still, when their housekeeper gets gossiping over a nice bit of fried liver, or their *cappellano* comes in with some new wine, they are but human, and they may mix up a little that they hear in the street with what they hear in the chapel. Why not? A man must talk, even when he is a holy one; that stands to reason.’

So she, who did not feel the necessity to talk, kept her own counsel.

She said to herself that it would be better the child should never have known that her father dwelt on that stony face of Medusa. What good could it do? As the child would grow older the thought would torment and fester in her, and lead her to evil, so she thought; and being a woman with a strong power of silence, the silence of one who has long lived alone with God, she never breathed the secret to any living soul.

Slowly the memory of Saturnino would die away, she knew, when he should be no more a living wonder on the hills, to feed their fancies with fresh legends of violence and romance. Saturnino was caged upon that isle whose strange shape lies on the blue waves, carved like a woman's head, with hair out-floating on the deep, and blank eyes staring up at Heaven. Costa has painted it so, and its name of Gorgon is old as the rocks are old.

There, galley-slaves (keeping their old name also) are mewed in a bitter company, and every now and then one escapes, and most likely is drowned, or shot, as he struggles in the waves; and every now and then strangers, curious and indifferent, come

over the water to see these caged gallows-birds, and stare at them blankly.

There are Italian children who look as though they had stepped down from a predella or a tryptich; they are like the singing children of Angelico, the light-bearing angels of Filippino, the pages of Vittorio Carpaccio, the winged boys of the Siennese masters. The old type is there still in all its purity; the oval face, the level brows, the curling hair, the spiritual eyes, the roselike, smiling, yet serious mouth which the painters of those happier times saw around them in the streets and in the fields.

There are so many Italian children still, looking on whom one thinks at once of dim rich altars, of gold-starred vaulted niches, of lunettes glowing in the dusk like jewels, of vaulted roofs that are borne up by the wings of sculptured angels.

This child, born from a mountain robber and named from the anointed penitent, was like one of these children who, in the works of the early masters, stand with chalice, or lyre, or dove of the Holy Spirit, about the feet of martyrs or around the throne of Mary. Only in the eyes of this creature, who was called a penitent ere she had sinned any sin,

there was a rebellious light, and in the arched mouth there was a resolute scorn that the masters did not put into their young servitors of God.

In feature she was strangely like the Angel of Annunciation of Carlo Dolce. It is the mode nowadays to deride Carlo Dolce, as it is the mode to deride melody in music; but let them chatter as they will, none can take away the lovely living light on his Gesu's infant face, nor deny the exquisite beauty of that angel who has all the yearning of humanity and all the grandeur of heaven in that perfect face which bends beneath its cloud of nimbus'd hair.

I pity those who can look unmoved on that angel where the painting hangs in the forsaken bed-chamber of the Pitti, whilst, beyond, there are the sweet still sunshine and the sounds of the falling waters of the gardens. Who can do so, may have the jargon of art on his tongue; he has not its secret in his soul. I would almost give up even the divine visions of Raffaele to have that herald of Christ for ever before my eyes.

There was a bad feeble copy of this seraphic thing in the Church of Santa Tar-

silla, but a copy of Carlo Dolce's own time, and therefore one made with reverence and tenderness; and Joconda would look at it where it hung above a side altar, and would think to herself, 'If it were not profane, how like the child of Saturnino!'

This likeness grew more and more strongly visible as she grew up to girlhood, and when her hair blew in the sea-wind of autumn, and the sun found the gold in its bronze, then had she an aureole too, and she had the light, the strength, the power, the mystery that are in Carlo's angel's face.

'Almost one looks to see wings spread from your shoulders!' said old Andreino to her, meaning only that she was like the sea-swallow in her swiftness and her faith in the sea; but Joconda, hearing him, thought, 'Have you too seen that likeness in her to Carlo's angel?'

But he had not; his eyes were always on the fish and the nets.

Fed on black bread and dried fish, with rarely anything else, for milk there was none, and fruit there was none, and meat was ever scarce, except when a lamb or kid was killed from some shepherd's passing

flock, she grew erect, strong, bold, bright, handsome; with a clear, colourless skin; and brown, lustrous, astonished eyes, and bright bronze-hued hair that Joconda brushed back from her brow in rippling masses, and cut short at the throat.

In summer she was clothed in the grey homespun linen that Joconda made, and in winter she was clad in blue or white woollen stuff instead; both short, straight little garments, very like in form to those of the Florentine choristers of Luca della Robbia.

In all weathers it was her delight to cast this off, and plunge into the sea and float there, indifferent to wind or sun; and this passion for the water got for her in her fourth year a popular name in Santa Tarsilla, which quite displaced and effaced the saintly one she had been baptised by; she was always called by the people—the few sickly suffering people, to whom the sea was but a breeding bed for fish—the *velia*, or sea-gull, that *larus marinus*, with plumage white as his native snows, which came from the northern ocean as soon as the north wind blew.

‘*C’è una velia!*’ an old man had said

once, seeing the child in the sea on a stormy day, when she looked no bigger than a sea-bird on the crest of foam ; and from that time she was known by that word chiefly, and also as the Musoncella.

‘ Musoncella ! ’ the other children yelled after her ; for in the songs that are sung in the Maremma, round the charcoal burner’s fires in the forest, and on the decks of the fishing feluccas on the sea, and behind the driven buffaloes in the reedy swampy plains, the girl that turns her face away is always twitted with this epithet.

Far il muso is to be scornful of, and sullen to, your kind : to have the black dog on your back as northerns phrase it.

It troubled Joconda to have that good name of Maria Penitente so utterly put aside and abandoned. It seemed as if the saints rejected the child of Saturnino, she thought. But when a popular tide of feeling rises high, no one can change it, even when it only sets toward a trick of speech in a fishing village, and Velia or Musoncella, the child was called by one and all, even by Joconda, who could not get out of the contagion of the nicknames.

She would not play with others ; she

played with the sails, with the surf, with the crystals of the salt, with anything rather than with the children, who, compared with her, were very timid, and were afraid of her, they could not have well told why, except that once, when one of them, twice her age, had worried Leone, she had darted into the hut and rushed out of it with a burning brand, which she would have hurled into the face of the boy who had hurt the dog if the women had not flung themselves on her.

When Joconda, who was absent that day, returned and heard, she trembled again. 'She is of Saturnino's blood,' she thought with fear. She was herself so old; she felt unequal to the task of training this lion-cub to lie down amidst the folded lambs.

The child certainly was not tender, and could be very fierce.

She liked best to be alone and to be always in movement; she never cared to be still, except in the church when there was a requiem or a choral mass, and the sounds went floating away into the dark dimly lit place and mingled with the sounds of the seas and the winds without. Then she would sit motionless, and sometimes her voice would

come out of her and rise far above her ken and hover in the air like a bird, and then the people would hold their breath to listen and mutter to one another, 'there must be a saint that thinks about her after all.'

For herself, she did not want any saint. The religion of Santa Tarsilla went past her ; it never reached her, still less did it ever enter into her. They had taught her the usual formula, and she had had the priestly benison on her dusky head like other children ; but it all went by her as the wind did ; it never took hold upon her. 'And yet Saturnino was a true believer,' said the good Priore of Santa Tarsilla, to whom alone Joconda had told the truth. Yes, the murderer and robber had believed devoutly, and had been a true Christian, so far as faith and fear could make him so, but this child was a heathen.

'I do not care for them ;' that was all she answered to the priest when he strove to make her love Christ and the saints.

She cared more for a fish with jewel-like eyes, when she could steal it away from the overflowing net, and let it glide back into the sea, and watch its fins stir, and its languid life quicken, till with a rush and a dash it vanished

into the lustrous silent depths where it had its being.

The child's desire to set all things free gave often a sharp pang to Joconda's heart.

'What would she say if she knew of her father on those rocks up yonder?' she would mutter now and then to the Priore, who would answer: 'There is no reason that she should ever know of him. It could do no good. She would think him a hero, as Maremma has done.'

'She would try to set him free, too, if she swam all night and all day to reach him,' said Joconda.

And as she grew older, and age with its many infirmities made her weaker both in brain and body, she began to be afraid, nervously afraid—calm, strong woman though she was—that anyone or anything should ever tell the child of that galley-slave at Gorgona.

No one did, and the child but rarely wondered whence she came; she took existence as a matter of course, like all ignorant creatures; it was no stranger that she should be alive than that the fish should be so in the water and the birds in the air. Culture

alone sets before the baffled brain the cruel problem : *why are we?*

Musa, as she was now oftenest called, was absolutely ignorant. But ignorance is not always stupidity ; and she was full of a restless, though dormant, intelligence which was always groping about blindly for knowledge. Of the arts she knew nothing, not so much as their names, but she had an instinct towards the love of them ; the lore of books was unknown to her, but she caught eagerly at all fragments of legend and tradition that came to her from the mouths of the old men and women around her ; that earth and sky were lovely no one had ever told her, but their beauty was full of vague delight to her. ‘A strange child,’ said the people of Santa Tarsilla always, because she would sit for hours quite still, with her dreamy eyes fastened on the stars of a summer night or the sea of an autumn day.

Once a fisher-lad, thinking to please her, had given her a branch of coral. Musa had taken it in silence. ‘You can sell it,’ said another girl of her age. ‘It is a brave piece and of rare colour.’ ‘When you grow bigger, and go in with the mule to the town,’

said another, 'you can have it cut into beads to wear; it is a brave piece.'

Musa had said nothing, but she got old Andrea's boat, that day, and rowed out to where the water was deep, and purple in colour, yet transparent as glass in its great depth; and there, being all alone, leaned over the boat's side and dropped the coral into the water, and watched it sink down, down, down, and join the other coral that grew there, far below.

'It will be happier,' she had said to herself; 'it is not where it came from, I dare say, but it is the best I can do.'

It had seemed to her that the coral would be so glad to be once more in those calm, cool and shadowy deeps where never burned the sun, and never sound was heard.

When she had reached land afterwards and met all the other children, and the giver of the coral amongst them, and they asked her for it, she had answered, 'I have put it back into the sea,' and they had screamed at her; and the fisher-lad sworn at her and tried to give her a blow: this was all her gratitude! they cried in offence and wrath.

Questioned, she could not very well have told why she had done it. Only she pitied

everything that was taken out of that fresh free life of the deep sea, and not seldom when she got a chance slipped back from the net into the waves the shining silver of the struggling fish, caught when the moon was high. For which not seldom she got a blow too. For men and women do not like pity that interferes with their livelihood.

‘Thou art a strange one!’ said Joconda many a time, for the splendid, abundant, daring health and strength of the child seemed strange there, in those pale fever mists, amidst those pallid, inert populations. She was good to the child, but she was afraid of her. The crimes of the Mastarna men seemed to her fancies to hover, like a cloud of guilt, above this innocent head. The blood that coursed so buoyantly in those blue veins was the blood of an assassin and a robber. Joconda could not forget that.

When she looked at the form of the child, leaping naked in the blue waters, she could not but look over to the north where the islands blent with the golden sky, and cross herself as she thought, ‘the father is there in chains!’

She was not even sure that the child cared for her; the child seemed to love

nothing except Leone the dog, and the sea. She had a passion for the winds and the waters, for the open moor, for the free air, and was no more to be kept within doors than a mountain beast or sea-bird would have been ; but for human creatures she did not care, and she had none of the caressing, clinging ways of childhood. The thought of her weighed heavily on Joconda ; it was a burden to her, night and day.

‘Does one suffer for doing good?’ she muttered with a sigh to her priest.

‘If one did not, where would be the merit of it?’ said he.

But Joconda shook her head ; the ways of the Saints were hard. Her old age had been already joyless and laborious and bare and meagre. But it had been tranquil, with no heavier care than to get provender for her mule, and bread for her own soup-pot. Now a weary apprehension, an anxious trouble, were with her always.

If the child, like the father, should offend God and man?

She knew nothing of transmitted taint and hereditary influence, but her experience told her that what is bred in the bone comes out in the flesh ; and her fears made her see

for ever behind the proud, bright, noble figure of the child the scarlet spectres of carnage and crime, the shadow of Saturnino Mastarna's sins.

‘And I am old,’ she would think; ‘I may die—die soon—and what then?’

Once the child terrified both Joconda and the village. A man threw a stone at Leone and hit the dog in the eye; she flew on the man and stabbed him with the knife with which she was cleaning a gourd.

The knife only made a skin wound, and the man was appeased with wine and a little money; but the terrible fury and convulsive rage of the child scared the people of Santa Tarsilla, though they were used to dagger thrusts and long feuds.

Joconda reasoned with her, and punished her, and threatened her; but nothing that she could do could convince the little rebel that she had been wrong.

‘Leone bites those who hurt me,’ was all that she would say.





CHAPTER IV.

SHE grew to eight years old without ever seeming to think of accounting for her own existence.

Then, abruptly one day she said to Joconda :

‘ Are you my mother ? ’

Joconda’s weatherbeaten hard face broke into a laugh.

‘ Lord ! baby—why I am seventy years old and more ! ’

‘ Where is my mother, then ? ’

‘ In heaven,’ said Joconda ; and thought, ‘ poor soul, more like in hell ! ’

The child was silent, pondering.

‘ Where is my father, then ? ’

‘ Why do you ask such things ? ’

‘ Because the others, they have a father and a mother apiece, where are mine ? ’

Joconda had often dreaded the question that sooner or later was sure to come.

‘Your father is dead,’ she answered.

‘Dead in the sea?’ said the child.

People were so often killed by the sea in Santa Tarsilla.

‘Yes,’ said Joconda, and she looked over to the north where she knew that the isle of Gorgona rose from the waves.

‘Did he go to fish?’ asked the child.

‘No, dear,’ said Joconda, with a pang at her heart. ‘No, dear; he was a mountaineer, he lived up yonder; in the hills; do not vex your soul over that, child; it is of no use.’

The child did not understand, nor did she give much heed; her grave straight brows were drawn together in thought, and her curved rosy lips were shut fast.

‘I think I do remember him,’ she said at last very slowly. ‘I remember him kissing me, and he had something cold and bright that hurt me, and he put it away, and then there were smoke, and screaming, and shots, and I crept under Leone’s stomach and hid. I do remember.’

‘You dreamt that, baby,’ said Joconda harshly, because she was pained; ‘the cold bright thing’ that had hurt her must have

been the dagger red with so much blood! But the child shook her head and persisted:

‘No: I do remember.’

And she sat down on the earthen floor, and put her arms round Leone, and leaned her head on his, and asked him, did he not remember too?

‘Bless the good God that made the beasts dumb!’ thought Joconda.

She hoped the child would not tell it to the neighbours. The child did not. She was never talkative, but held herself aloof; not out of shyness nor yet out of temper, because she was a bold child, and except for rare fits of untamable passion, was of serene temper, but out of a seriousness and indifference that seemed strange in one so young.

There was no one to give her guardian counsel in Santa Tarsilla.

The priest was a homely, ignorant man, son of a fisherman, one of themselves in both his ways and thoughts, and the rest were all poor creatures in her estimation, shrunk and sickened with fever, swollen with dropsy, or palsied with the ague of the coast, as they so often were, and living quite away from the world of men, hardly knowing when revolution was

running riot in the cities, hardly hearing when ships were sinking, and squadrons were falling, in war upon sea or land.

There is, perhaps, no isolation more complete, no ignorance more absolute, than that of a little obscure town on the 'accursed Maremma,' as the people call this rich and fruitful land, because the greed and the folly of men have cursed it.

No one comes nigh it; nothing is done for it; now and then, with years between each, travellers may wander to the sites of Etruscan cities, or hunters come to kill the wild, soft creatures of the marsh and moor; that is all. The only thing known of government is the tax wrung out of the empty pocket; the fine, for which the cupboard must go breadless; no one can write, scarce any one can read; submission and weakness beget indifference to all things; if any great tidings are brought, no one cares; it will make no difference to the people. They creep about in the sun, and the slow boats go out, and the sultry heavens hang over the torpid sea, and when the bell rings they all wend their listless way to the old church and pray to Something which they believe in, but which does

not help them, and so their lives go on and end : and no one cares.

It is the sea-shore, indeed.

But all the health, and vigour, and strong activity, and pungent fresh odours, and buoyant winds, of the sea elsewhere are too often missing here. No one knows how hateful the blessed and beautiful sea can be who has not seen it, oily, and glassy, and motionless, stretching under a grey sky that looks parched with mists of intensest heat, and with the fever fog of the poisonous summer hovering about the glaring sands.

It is no sin of the sea's ; the sin is man's alone.

Centuries upon centuries of carnage, and destruction, and fatal waste, have laid the land bare, and brought disease and desolation in their train. Perhaps one day the whole earth will be like this wasted Maremma shore ; it is very possible. This land was healthful and lovely enough in the days when the legions of Fabius coveted its wealth ; and even in the later age, when Rutilius dropped anchor at Populonia, it was still for the most part busy, crowded, prosperous.

The sickliness of the shore, however,

seems little to affect children, and it hurt not at all the buoyant health and elastic strength of the young child they called Velia and the Musoncella. For one thing, she was for ever in the water when she was not scampering, fleet of foot as the hill goats, along the sands, or further out to the moorlands, where the fresher air was. Hardy men came from the mountains, and fell sick, and even died; strong soldiers came on guard from hot cities, and there grew wasted, and languid, and ill, but she throve there with a splendid vitality and vigour that were the pride of Joconda and her shame; her shame, because it recalled to her the face and form which she had seen for the last time by the red autumn light in the market place at Grosseto.

‘She is his image,’ she would say, scanning the pure, oval face, the arched, proud lips, the eyes like the eyes of the Braschi Antinous, the whole face that had the colour and the beauty of a flower with the firm lines of a classic bronze.

Of beauty she was no great judge, herself, but she knew that this child was beautiful with the terrible beauty of Saturnino.

The law, with its curious one-sided chastisement which it calls justice, had taken to itself the guilty man, and left the innocent offspring alone to perish as it might; and the heart of Joconda was heavy because she herself was old and the child was so young, and was not a child to put away in peace within convent walls, nor yet grow up to dwell contentedly in a fisherman's hut.

‘Blood will out,’ she thought.

Meanwhile the child for the time was content enough; she fared hardly, for Joconda could do no better for her; she bit black bread and salt fish with her pearl-like teeth and often was hungry; she raked in the glass wrack and the ribbon weed for fuel, and wore rough homespun clothes about her supple loins, but she was content enough; she had the freedom of the shore and the sea, and if any maltreated her it was the worse for them. And she knew nothing of that wild life which had been caught like a wild beast, and caged like one, on that island, which lay far off upon the waters like a little light golden cloud.

When she grew old enough to listen to what people said, the story of Saturnino had

grown older also, and few even gave a thought to it. There had been wars and other heroes since then; he was at the galleys at Gorgona; but the Maremma had ceased to talk of him except when, now and then, round a fire in the forests, or becalmed out at sea, a charcoal burner or a coral fisher would say, 'Aïe! he *was* a man!—that was in the good time; we have no such men now, we are all afraid.'

For as the monotonous years rolled on, all alike, exactly alike, bringing the drouth of summer and the storms of winter over the low sea-shore, twelve years had drifted away like twelve hours, and the child was fourteen years old before Joconda could have counted twelve on her fingers; so she said, one day, looking up at the lithe figure between her and the sunshine.

'Holy Mary, you will be a woman before one knows it!' she cried, with a pang at her heart, for she was now very old herself, and when she was gone—who could tell?

'A woman!' repeated the girl: it did not seem a word that suited her.

'Yes, you are not a boy,' said Joconda testily. 'So a woman you will be, worse

luck. If one could only see a little way ahead—woe's me !'

'Does it vex you I am not a boy?' said the girl. 'Why should it vex you? I can do all that they can. I can row better than many, and sail and steer; I can dive too, and I know what to do with the nets; if I had a boat of my own you would see what I could do.'

'All that is very well,' said Joconda, with a little nod. 'I do not say it is not. But you have not the boat of your own, that is just it; that is what women always suffer from; they have to steer, but the craft is someone else's and the haul too.'

The child looked at her from under bent brows. She did not understand the words, she took them literally.

'For me,' she said, 'I do not care whose it is, not at all; I care for the fishing, but what does it matter who has what it brings?'

'It matters when one starves,' said Joconda.

'But we do not starve.'

'No we do not.'

She spoke with curtness, but there was a dimness in her eyes that was not merely

from old age. They did not, while she was here, with her lease of the old house, and her prudent savings, but when she was gone?——

The people were very poor ; they could seldom get food enough for themselves ; who would cherish a nameless child ? She herself, though she had neighbours, had no friends ; she was always the ‘ woman of Savoy ’ to all the folks of Santa Tarsilla.

It made her very anxious, for she was a good woman, and the creature that lay on her bed and ate at her board, she loved, though she said but little.

‘ Do you ever think that I shall die ? ’ she said abruptly to the child, who looked at her in some surprise.

‘ Die ? ’ she echoed. ‘ That is going away into the earth, you mean, as everything does, and then it goes upward and lives with God, they say ; would you wish that ? ’

‘ I will have to do it whether I wish or not, and about living with God I do not know. I am a sinful soul, though not worse than most. But you do not understand. When I am dead, under the earth as you say, what will you do ? ’

‘I do not know.’

She did not ; she had never thought of the matter ; her mind was blank, though her body was vigorous. Then she added after a little thought :

‘I will give myself to the sea ; that is the way I will die.’

‘You ! I speak of myself.’

‘I will die if you do.’

Joconda looked at her amazed and keenly touched.

‘Do you love me so much then ?’ she cried suddenly.

‘Is that love ?’ said the child. ‘I should not like to live if you were not here ; I do not know if you call that love.’

‘It is love,’ said Joconda.

She felt her eyes full of the slow tears of age, tears salt as the crystals the sea left on the shore. ‘Ah, my dear, my dear !’ she muttered, ‘It is not myself that will cause you to die for love, but it may be some other—when I am gone and cannot help you ! Ah, child, why were you born ?’

Musa did not hear ; she was standing with her brown hand on the white head of her dog looking out seaward ; the words that had been spoken had not saddened her

because they were vague to her. Joconda had always been there—why should she go away to earth or sky?

It was an April day; at this season the sea had no vapour and the shore no miasma; there was enough breeze to curl the little waves and send the foam in ripples; the boats were out and the low pale beach was alive with life, as the women shook and tossed the seaweed, and raked up the crystals of the salt, in the morning light.

‘If I had only a boat!’ she said with a sigh.

It seemed to her the one supreme glory of life—a boat.

A boat altogether one’s own, to go out with in wild weather when all others were afraid; to lie in, all still and alone, on tranquil waters, gazing down into the blue depths where the coral branches were, and the starry flowers of the sea, and the gemlike eyes of the fishes; to steer, all by oneself, through tossing roaring breakers, through wind and tempest, under inky skies and beetling rocks, with the fierce hurricane in front and the thundering waters behind; a boat all one’s own; that was the one triumph of life.

But she had no boat ; Joconda could not give her one ; and when it was stormy weather the men put her back, and would not let her go with them, because she was a child, because she would be a woman. Yes ; she understood as she thought of the boat ; she understood that it was very bad to be a woman.

Joconda broke in on her thoughts.

‘ Wild bird of sea and cloud,’ she said more tenderly than she had ever spoken, ‘ you are a stormy petrel, but there may come a storm too many—and I am old. I have done my best, but that is little. If you were a lad, one would not be so uneasy. I suppose the good God knows best—if one could be sure of that—I am a hard-working woman, and I have done no great sin that I know of, but up in heaven they never take any thought of me. When I was young, I asked them at my marriage altar to help me, and when my boys were born, I did the same, but they never noticed ; my man was drowned, and my beautiful boys got the fever, and sickened one by one and died : that was all I got. Priests say it is best ; priests are not mothers.’

She was silent awhile, her thoughts tra-

velling backward many a year to the time when she had been young, and had known both the joys and the travails begotten of love. She had been a hard-working woman, toiling for the bare bread of life, until she had grown old; but she had been faithful, and she had not forgotten.

Only heaven had forgotten her.

She was one amongst so many, she thought; it was not wonderful.

Then she roused herself and went on with her speech to the child.

‘I am old and you are young. Soon I must leave you, dear, down in the earth, up in the sky, one way or another I must go. I am anxious—there is the little money in the jug under the bricks, and the linen and the mule, that is all; the house goes back to the master. I cannot tell what you will do—may the saints spare me just a little. If you were a woman grown, one would not be so anxious. To please me will you go and learn of the Sisters?’

‘No,’ said the child, resolutely. There was a bare, dreary place near at hand, where a few good women dwelt, who nursed the fever-stricken and taught the children.

They would have taught this child, too, but she would never go to them.

‘Within four walls I am stupid as a stone,’ she said, and said aright.

‘But the Sisters would help you to learn things useful for all your life.’

The child shook her head.

‘I can sail a boat and cast a net ; they cannot.’

‘Some fisher lad must take you in a year or two.’

‘They will not take me,’ said the child, not understanding the sense that was meant.

‘They are jealous, because I am strong. The old men take me ; they are kind, sometimes ; old Andreino most of all.’

Joconda said no more ; she would not disturb the innocence and ignorance of the child by saying what she herself had meant.

‘These thoughts come soon enough,’ she said to herself, and added aloud :

‘Don Piero says you sing like all the angels. That is better than even to sail a boat, for it pleases those in heaven.’

‘I sing for myself,’ said the child, ‘and it is on the sea that I sing the best. In the church my throat gets full of dust ; there is no air, and I hate it.’

‘Hush, hush! The church is a holy place, and the sea may drown you some day.’

‘It is a good death,’ said the child, carelessly.

Joconda shuddered; she remembered the night of fifty years before, when her husband’s boat had gone down, heeling over into the white, boiling surf, on the very edge of the shore.

‘There are such beautiful things to see down, down, deep down, in the sea,’ added the child.

‘What good is that to them? Dead men are blind,’ said Joconda wearily. ‘Whether you lie in the sand or the sea it matters nothing once you are dead, but it matters to those that are left. Child, do not talk of such things; death is no toy, and the sea is greedy always.’

‘The sea is good,’ said the child jealously, as if some creature she loved were aspersed. ‘The sea is better than the land. You wish me a boy. It is a seagull that I wish I were; I would be if I could.’

‘A seagull cannot sing.’

‘I would sooner fly than sing. It is something that sings in my throat, not me;

but when I swim, when I dive, that is *all* me.'

Joconda for her part did not understand.

'You are a strange creature,' she said impatiently. 'It would have been better if you had been ugly and quiet, and without that devil in you that will never let you be still. But it is no fault of yours. There are seagulls and there are barn-door fowls, and the good Lord made them both. Well, go, rake some seaweed together or any other rack of your precious sea that one can burn; we are very poor; we shall be poorer, for I get too old and you are too young.'

Joconda looked after her as the little erect figure stood out in the light against the turquoise blue of the sky and sea, and the primrose colour of the low sunlit clouds.

'She would never be a house-keeping, heaven-fearing thing,' she thought with a sigh. 'All one can hope for is that she may please some fishing lad and be an honest mother of young sea dogs. There is fierce blood in her; it will out.'

And she felt sorrowful, and as though she herself had done some sin, sitting in the stone archway of her house door with the heavy brown sail dropped across her knees.



CHAPTER V.

MEANWHILE, the child went out to her task. She was always willing to labour in the open air. It was only against four walls that she rebelled.

She had taken a kreel, and a fork, and went down to the black and purple masses of algæ that a rough sea of the night before had cast on the shore. Her feet were bare ; her grey linen garment clung close to her graceful and strong limbs ; her hair was cut so that it only touched her throat, and was as brilliant in the sunshine as that bronze of emperors which had gold ungrudged in its formation ; her noble eyes grave, lustrous, wide opened, gazed over the sunlight, beyond the bay, to the open sea.

She was not unhappy, because Joconda was good to her ; because she had perfect health and strength, because she had no sorrow and took no thought, living a simple unconscious existence like any one of the northern birds that she was called after ; but she was always restless ; she always wanted something, but she never knew what ; sometimes she would dive headforemost into the deep water and fancy she might find it there ; sometimes she would get away into the moors in the great summer silence, and sit there alone and wonder, but nothing was very clear to her.

Without culture, neither wishes nor wonder are very intelligible, and Musa, though she had been forced to put letters together till she could read the names of the boats and the saints, and other familiar things, was very ignorant. Her mind was a blank,—as her soul was ; all that was alive and strong in her, was physical life ; life abundant, vigorous, untiring, beautiful, like the life of a forest animal.

The few fishing-cobbles that Santa Tarsilla owned, were out at sea ; there was only one man left on the beach who was

tinkering up his own old boat and humming to himself that song of the coast,

Chi va in Maremma, saluti il bel giglio
Che sta sulle montagne di Solia !

He was called Andreino, or Little Andrew, perhaps for no other reason than that he was a very tall, lean, angular man ; bent and yellow, and very old ; so old that his age was lost even to himself in the fog of some irrevocable and inconceivable past.

‘Avante ’l regno dei Francesi,’ he would say with a vague sense of unlimited ancientness. When a boy he had been very nearly shot by a squadron of French lancers, and this had impressed the epoch of invasion on him ; and most things with him were referred to that time.

He was a garrulous man, and had many stories, mythical and fantastical, in which he believed ; things that he had seen and done in real truth, but which had become distorted or transfigured, according to their kind through the loss of his many years. To these tales Santa Tarsilla always listened in the long hot evenings of the weary summer, when not a hand had scarcely

strength to twang a string of a chitarra, and only the tongues wagged on as their owners lay full length on stone or sand.

Amongst his listeners there was none so attentive as the wild-bird Velia. She would stand or sit with parted lips and wondering eyes, and listen to all he said without a word ; mute and awed, and charmed to stillness. For that homage of attention, which she had rendered to him ever since she was old enough to know the meaning of words, old Andreino favoured her.

Santa Tarsilla did not. She was stronger, brighter, bolder, than its sickly children, and moreover it was jealous because it was always thought the woman of Savoy had hidden treasure, and of course what there was the child would have, when in due course the silent life of the Savoyard should sink into the intenser silence of the tomb.

‘ They say he sang too well, and that was why they burnt him,’ said Andreino to her to-day, after telling her for the hundredth time of what he had seen once on the Ligurian shore, far away yonder northward, when he, who knew nothing of Adonais or Prometheus, had been called, a stout seafaring man in that time, amongst other

peasants of the country side, to help bring in the wood for a funeral pyre by the sea.

He had known nought of the songs or the singer, but he loved to tell the tale he had heard then ; and say how he had seen, he himself, with his own eyes, the drowned poet burn, far away yonder where the pines stood by the sea, and how the flames had curled around the heart that men had done their best to break, and how it had remained unburned in the midst, whilst all the rest drifted in ashes down the wind. He knew nought of the Skylark's ode, and nought of the *Cor Cordium* ; but the scene by the sea-shore had burned itself as though with flame into his mind, and he spoke of it a thousand times if once, sitting by the edge of the sea that had killed the singer.

‘ Will they burn me if I sing too well ? ’ the child asked him this day, the words of *Joconda* being with her.

‘ Oh, that is sure, ’ said Andreino, half in jest and half in earnest. ‘ They burnt him because he sang better than all of them. So they said. I do not know. I know the resin ran out of the pinewood all golden and hissing, and his heart would not burn,

all we could do. You are a female thing, Musa ; your heart will be the first to burn, the first of all !’

‘ Will it ? ’ said Musa, seriously, but not in any way alarmed, for the thought of that flaming pile by the seashore by night was a familiar image to her.

‘ Aye, for sure ; you will be a woman ! ’ said Andreino, hammering into his boat.

She knitted her brows in angry meditation, and went slowly away from him.

Andreino looked after her as Joconda had done.

‘ She grows fast,’ he said, as he took his pipe from his mouth. His wife was sitting near him on a block of stone, a feeble, ague-stricken, wasted creature.

‘ She grows fast,’ he repeated. ‘ I wish we could get her for little Nando ; she has a rare courage, and is as handsome as an almond tree in flower.’

‘ She is a child,’ said the wife ; ‘ how you talk ! ’

‘ In a year she will not be a child. The almond tree is first to flower, but it is soon off blossom,’ said Andreino, hammering at the crazy timbers of his old boat. ‘ The woman of Savoy should look out for a stout

and honest lad. She is too much alone. She ponders too much. That is not good. Were she my girl I would get a good lad.'

'There are no lads here.'

'But some come ashore from the coasters ; a child as handsome as that one, with the pretty penny the woman of Savoy has got under the hearthstone, need never go a begging. If she were like Dina, yonder, she would soon leave off thinking about dead singers and their hearts.'

He pointed with his pipe-stem to his grand-daughter, a young woman, who, with one child on her breast and another on her back, was mending nets on the mole wall.

'She is a baby herself,' said his wife, 'and it is you who tell her all those tales. Why did you tell her if it was anything wrong.'

'It is nothing wrong,' said Andreino, offended. 'Is it likely I would tell a child a wrong thing? All the others they listen and gape ; it is only she who takes the tale to heart in that fashion. Things one says are like well-water ; it is the pitcher they are poured into that colours them.'

'The pitcher is as it is made,' said the old wife, who was a sensible and positive woman.

‘I never said it was not,’ said Andreino.

Musa worked on steadily at her task, carrying load after load of marramgrass, cud-weed, and seahay, into the house, which stood at the edge of the little mole of Santa Tarsilla between the quay and the beach.

When she had reached her last load, and Joconda, looking up from her own work at the sail, called out from the distance ‘enough!’ she stood a moment with her hands lightly resting on her hips and looked over the pale sands, the white stones, the blue waves.

Then she pursued her last task of carrying in the weed, as other women were doing also. The morning was young still; there was an opal-hued light on land, and sky and sea; the low, flat beach was wet with recent showers; the air was cool and fragrant; even the stagnant salt-pools and the dreary marsh lands took the sweet hues of the springtime and the morning.

Although she had taken in a good provision of the algæ and salt-water plants and stacked it in the mule’s stable, it was still early. Joconda was now baking her black loaves of bread, and the house was full of grey smoke.

‘Run out again,’ she said to the child. ‘You are like a goat ; you stay ill at ease in stall.’

Musa wanted no other word ; she was out and away along the shore almost as soon as it was spoken, the dog Leone with her ; though he grew old he seldom left her side.

‘May I have the boat?’ she asked of her friend Andreino, and he nodded assent ; he had to stay at home and mend his nets. His legs were stiff and helpless with rheumatism. He adored his boat, but he could trust her with it. She was as good a sailor as himself, and knew no fear.

She ran down to the place where the punt was drawn up on the low sands, and pushed it to the water ; she sprang in, and bade the dog stay and mind Joconda. She set the sail. There was a fair wind blowing from the south ; the little boat went with it. Now and then she gave it the aid of the oars, but seldom. She could sit at rest, with the tiller rope round her foot, and let the boat go along the shore.

The land had no loveliness on that bay, but the sea had much in that radiant and tranquil morning, and from the water even

the land looked almost lovely, with the dark masses of the mountains at the back still keeping the clouds and the mists about them. They were far away, but they looked almost near, those blue and sombre hills that had held so many secrets and so many sins of the father of whom she knew nothing.

When she had left Santa Tarsilla behind her by a mile, the water was rougher, the wind was brisker, the boat flew faster, the child grew gayer. She was all alone on the sea as far as her eyes could reach, except for a few large vessels away on the horizon, merchant ships bearing grain or spice to the old harbours of the classic world.

The voice that according to her own fancy was not herself, but some bird singing in her, rose unconsciously to her lips as she felt happy ; happy in the sense of liberty, of movement, of space, and air, and light. She sang aloud ; all that sweet, wild, unwritten music of the people which they sing at marriage feasts and in threshing yards, about the forest fires, and behind the oxen's yoke ; natural song, pastoral and amorous, that might thrill the world with its sweetness, only no Theocritus has arisen amongst these

singers to make fair in fame this sad Maremma land, and to string strophes that would echo through two thousand years, telling stories of their sorrows of the sea and of their loves and lives on land. Centuries come and go, and every winter the people sing around their fires, and every summer the fever wastes them and they die, and the living still sing because they still love; but the world does not hear the song. Shelley and Theocritus are dead.

Musa sang as the birds do, as the people do, scarce knowing that she did so, and the clear, tender notes, with all the flute-like melody of extreme youth in them, echoed over the waters, and startled the rock-martins working at their conical houses.

The child was happy without any reasoning or any consciousness that she was so, like any other young animal. The sense of motion, of fresh wind, of wide sea, of being able to go wherever she chose, and guide the boat as she liked, appeased the restlessness which tormented her like a fever when she was in the house of Joconda, or in the church with the others, or wherever, as she said, there were four walls imprisoning her. The other children thought her

fierce and sullen, the women thought her dull and intractable, the priests thought her heathenish; but she was none of these things; she was only a young creature of splendid health and vigour, with sentiments in her that had no name, and found no home in the world that was around her: she was the child of Saturnino.

The boat went through the waters swiftly, as the wind blew more strongly; the sandy shore with its scrub of low-growing rock-rose¹ and prickly Christ's-thorn did not change its landscape, but what she looked at always was the sea; the sea that in the light had the smiling azure of a young child's eyes, and when the clouds cast shadows on it, had the intense impenetrable brilliancy of a jewel.

In the distance were puffs of white and grey, like smoke or mist; those mists were Corsica and Capraja.

Elba towered close at hand.

Gorgona lay far beyond, with all the other little isles that seem made to shelter Miranda and Ariel, but of Gorgona she knew nothing; she was steering straight towards it, but it was many a league distant on the northerly water.

¹ *Helianthemum apenninum*.

When she at last stopped her boat in its course she was at the Sasso Scritto : a favourite resting-place with her, where, on feast-days, when Joconda let her have liberty from housework and rush-plaiting and spinning of flax, she always came.

Northward, there was a long smooth level beach of sand, and beyond that a lagoon where all the water-birds that love both the sea and the marsh came in large flocks, and spread their wings over the broad spaces in which the salt water and the fresh were mingled. Beyond this there were cliffs of the humid red tufa, and the myrtle and the holy thorn grew down their sides, and met in summer the fragrant hesperis of the shore.

These cliffs were fine bold bluffs, and one of them had been called from time immemorial the Sasso Scritto,—why, no one knew ; the only writing on it was done by the hand of Nature. It was steep and lofty ; on its summit were the ruins of an old fortress of the middle ages ; its sides were clothed with myrtle, aloe, and rosemary, and at its feet were boulders of marble, rose and white in the sun ; rock pools, with exquisite network of sunbeams crossing their rippling surface, and filled with green ribbon-grasses

and red sea-foliage, and shining gleams of broken porphyry, and pieces of agate and cornelian.

The yellow sands hereabouts were bright just now with the sea-daffodil, and the sea-stocks, which would blossom later, were pricking upward to the Lenten light; great clusters of southern-wood waved in the wind, and the pungent sea-rush grew in long lines along the shore, where the sand-piper was dropping her eggs, and the blue-rock was carrying dry twigs and grass to his home in the ruins above or the caverns beneath, and the stock-doves in large companies were winging their way over sea towards the Maritime or the Pennine Alps.

This was a place that Musa loved, and she would come here and sit for hours, and watch the roseate cloud of the returning flamingoes winging their way from Sardinia, and the martins busy at their masonry in the cliffs, and the Arctic longipennes going away northward as the weather opened, and the stream-swallows hunting early gnats and frogs on the water, and the kingfisher digging his tortuous underground home in the sand. Here she would lie for hours amongst the rosemary, and make silent friendships with the

populations of the air, while the sweet blue sky was above her head, and the sea, as blue, stretched away till it was lost in light.

Once up above, on these cliffs, the eye could sweep over the sea north and south, and the soil was more than ever scented with that fragrant and humble blue-flowered shrub of which the English madrigals and glees of the Stuart and Hanoverian poets so often speak, and seem to smell. Behind the cliffs stretched moorland, marshes, woodland, intermingled, crossed by many streams, holding many pools, blue-fringed in May with iris, and osier beds, and vast fields of reeds, and breadths of forest with dense thorny underwood, where all wild birds came in their season, and where all was quiet, save for a bittern's cry, a boar's snort, a snipe's scream, on the lands once crowded with the multitudes that gave the eagle of Persia and the brazen trumpets of Lydia to the legions of Rome.

Under their thickets of the prickly sloe-tree and the sweet-smelling bay lay the winding ways of buried cities; their runlets of water rippled where kings and warriors slept beneath the soil, and the yellow marsh lily, and the purple and the rose

of the wind-flower and the pasque-flower, and the bright red of the Easter tulips, and the white and the gold of the asphodels, and the colours of a thousand other rarer and less homelike blossoms, spread their innocent glory in their turn to the sky and the breeze, above the sunken stones of courts and gates and palaces and prisons.

These moors were almost as solitary as the deserts are.

Now and then, against the blue of the sky and the brown of the wood, there rose the shapes of shepherds and their flocks; now and then herds of young horses went by, fleet and unconscious of their doom; now and then the sound of a rifle cracked the silence of the windless air; but these came but seldom.

Maremma is wide, and its people are scattered.

In autumn and in winter hunters, shepherds, swineherds; sportsmen, birdcatchers, might spoil the solemn peace of these moors, but in spring and summer no human soul was seen upon them. The boar and the buffalo, the flamingo and the roebuck, the great plover and the woodcock, reigned alone.

The child loved them and came to them.

Tireless, she would wander over the grass and moss and thyme for hours and hours ; even when the sun was so strong that the very cicadas themselves were silent against their wont, she felt no harm from it, and the fevers that lurked in bush and brake never touched her ; in these calm solitary places, where she was alone with the powerful creatures, four-footed or winged, that slept beside her in the drowsy, sultry noons, she was at ease and happy. Even in the sickly drouth of midsummer, when the turf was like sheets of brass, and the very trees seemed to faint and pant, she was well here.

She tied her boat now to a tough shrub growing on the edge of the shore and began to go inland ; a slender figure for her age, tall, brown, and lithe, with a proud dauntless carriage of her head and body, and eyes that seemed made like the eagle's to dart their light into the light of the sun.

The road she took now lay over the cliffs and across the moorland ; although so much nobler and more beautiful than the marshy ground that stretched so drearily around Santa Tarsilla, it was not much healthier, for heavy vapours hung over it, and stagnant waters intersected it, but it

had far more character and a luxuriant vegetation, though both were sombre and mournful from the utter loneliness that prevailed there.

She went onwards, happy though solitary, watching with grave eyes the flight of feathered things and the movements of animal life. She knew their ways better than those of the human people around her at Santa Tarsilla; the turtle-dove and the common coot, the fox and the hare, the mole and the porcupine, and a hundred other tribes that lived their life in the dull waste once peopled by the Pelasgic and Etrurian nation—all were dear to her and familiar; and even of the savage boar, the monarch of the marshes, she was never afraid when he passed her with gleaming tusks and fierce eyes, crushing boughs and branches in his ponderous haste, and pushing his shaggy crest through the reeds.

She used to wish that she were he, great, strong, bold, ruler of the swamps, living his hardy life under the oak shadows, and dying, when he did die, with his front to the foe and his fangs red with vengeance.

‘Why cannot they let him alone?’ she said to herself once, when she saw hunters

pursuing him with their hounds through the hot dank solitudes that were his rightful kingdom. She had sympathy with the hunted, not with the hunters.

The boar, let alone, did no living thing harm ; he ate the green leaves, the wet grass, the red reeds, the wild fruits ; he only wanted the air to breathe, the moor to roam over, the pool to bathe in. Where was the sin of such a simple need ? She did not reason, she only felt, and the fate of the hunted and innocent brutes seemed a wrong to her, a cruel and wanton wrong.

To-day she saw a herd of them, at a little distance, in peace, pushing through the reedy thickets, happy in their own rough clumsy way, lifting their bristling manes above the flower-foam of the spring-snowflakes and the Lenten lilies.

She was glad to see them so, and went on, content.

The sun shone, the birds sang, the roots of the *nuphar lutea* were beginning to spread their broad leaves on the waters, the primroses and daffodils were making the sombre earth bright in many a nook by the shallows and pools. It was in Maremma, accursed Maremma, but it was springtime,

and even here the world was once more young. Musa passed singing—like the poet's Pippa.

She was accursed for no fault of her own, like her native Maremma, but it was springtime with her also, for it was youth.

Suddenly as her light feet went over hills and hillocks that here were of yellow sandstone, not of tufa, and were clothed and covered up in greenery, she felt the earth give way beneath her ; she sank through the creeping-moss and maidenhair up to her hips ; she thought it was one of the innumerable spots where stagnant water was hidden under foliage and flowers, but her feet were not wet ; it was not even mud. She had caught hold of some tangled junipers as she felt herself sink, and by these raised herself on to safer standing ground. Looking down to see why it was the earth had given way, since there was no water and no swamp, she saw a hole in the ground like a fox's earth. It was into this hole her feet had gone. Thinking always of the creatures of the moorland she leaned down to see which of them might have made his lair there.

The wood grew very thickly everywhere, but the *arbutus unedo* and bilberry and

laurel, the butcher's broom, and mountain-box, and ever-prevailing marucca, grew more luxuriantly still above these mounds.

She stooped nearer and cleared the grasses away; there was an orifice large enough for all her body to enter, and she saw a step of stone down in the dusk of the opening. Musa did not know fear, and enterprise was strong in her.

With some difficulty she thrust herself downward into the aperture; and, groping with head bent and shoulders bowed, got her feet upon the stone. It was the first step of a staircase; of such a staircase as was hewn roughly and laid together in the old house of Joconda, to lead down into the cellar. The descent was difficult, the passage very narrow; the sunbeams slanting in showed her the outline of the stairs, and she thrust herself down them, bruising herself at every step.

At the foot of this rude stairway was a portico, without doors, and with the figure of a winged genius holding a torch, and of a couchant lion, carved boldly on each side of it in the stratified sandstone of the rock. The rank growth, overhead and all around, of vegetation, made a labyrinth of

prickly boughs and of entangled foliage before the porch, as above the steps. But the curiosity and the interest of Musa were awakened; she knew it was no shepherd's dwelling, for their huts were always raised upon the open soil, conical in shape, and thatched with rushes and ling. She hacked away the thorny network that made a screen before this open doorway, having in her girdle the large strong knife that she always carried for many uses, and after some long tedious labour, which tore her hands and arms with many a thorn, and sent many a spider and beetle and little snake hurrying from their homes, she cleared the way before the opening enough to pass through it with her shoulders bent, and found herself in a small, square, stone chamber hewn out of the rock, and empty, save for a little grey dust in a niche like a dog's kennel, and an urn or vase of red and black earthenware.

It looked a strange, chill, melancholy place; she could not make out its use or object; there was no scholar near to say to her, 'this dreary vestibule is the imitation of the *cellula janitoris*; yonder is the dust of some favourite watch-dog; in the urn, doubtless, are the ashes of some favoured and

faithful slave ; the master must lie beyond ; it was only the humble whose bodies were burned.'

Learning was not with her to shed light on her from its lamp ; she had no other guide than instinct, and instinct here was naturally curiosity. In her temper timidity had no place. In front of her, in the wall of this entrance-chamber was a stone door, a double, or, as it is commonly termed, folding door, tight closed. She crossed the rock-floor of the place, while a great grand-duke owl, roused and alarmed, flew heavily by her, as owls fly when daybreak overtakes them, and strings of bats hanging to the stone jambs of the roof, clinging to each other by their claws, in a string, like so many onions, now awakened from their winter sleep, swayed to and fro uneasily, and uttered their shrill sibilation of annoyance and fear. Probably for thousands of years, generation after generation of cheiroptera had there made their daily bed, their winter's refuge, undisturbed by man, at nightfall finding their way through the tangle of the shrubs and flying on their moth-hunting quest over the wide face of the moor.

'It is like the cavern of S. Giovanni

Bocca d'Oro,' she thought ; not that she had much affinity with holy men and legends, but their histories had been all the teaching she had received.

All the while, as she pondered thus, and wondered if she should find S. John Chrysostom here, with the glory round his head, she continued her efforts to unclosethe door, above the lintel of which there was painted on the sandstone a strange winged shape with angry countenance and wreathing curls.

She pushed with all her young strength against that mysterious barrier.

A strange excitement and anxiety, such as she had never felt, possessed her. She longed to penetrate the secret of these strange dwellings. She said to herself, 'Joconda found me in the hills ; may be these people that dwell in stone lower than the surface of the earth are my own people.'

It was an odd fancy that had come into her head, but she thought it so likely that she had been born in some such place as this, hidden away under the leaves and the furze, where men could not reach, nor the scream of their voices intrude.

She had torn and hacked the shrubs

away from about the entrance, and the light from the cloudless skies above shone down steadily. She pushed with her hands against the stone with the innocent unreasoning curiosity of a child. There was no lock nor bolt upon the door, nor were there any hinges. It would turn, if it turned at all, in sockets cut in the stone; and turn at the last it did, slowly opening as though some unwilling hand were behind it. She thrust it backward, wider and wider, until she entered it, and stood on the threshold of a narrow chamber hewn in the dark grey rock; on either side couched a stone lion. She entered; timid for the first time in her bold brief life.

Around the walls ran benches of stone; on them stood vases and jars in black ware, and others in white painted pottery, bronze lamps, and amber ornaments, and strange little vessels whose like she had never seen. There was nothing else. An archway, however, in the end wall showed beyond another and larger chamber. Curiosity and wonder mastering fear, the child passed through the first room and entered the second.

On its threshold she paused entranced and appalled.

Upon the walls of this spacious place were painted figures seated at a banquet, dancing before an altar, leading strange forest beasts, playing on lyres, riding on many-coloured steeds: around them and above them were pictured lotus flowers.

But these she scarcely saw in the dim shadowy atmosphere; what her gaze was fastened on, what made her tremble in every limb, was the recumbent figure, stretched upon a bier of stone, of a man in armour of bronze and casque of gold; a gold cup stood beside him on the ground, and a shield of gold was on the bier, and a golden lamp was near, of which the light was spent. About his helmet was a diadem of oak-leaves in gold, and on his breast was an ivory sceptre tipped with an eagle of gold.

When the vast, desolate, lonely lands stretching towards the south had borne on their breast the towers and walls and palaces and sepulchres of Vetulonia and Cosa, of Rusellæ and Tarquinii, of Ardea and Norchia, this man had been a magnate of the land; his women, his children, his servitors, his descendants for many a generation, had doubtless been laid in costly state here, where the mastic-tree and the mountain-box

now flourished and built a green wall between them and the world.

Youth laughed and kissed ; ships went and came over the sunny sea ; street crowds still met for sale and barter ; and marble walls still towered up to heaven in man's pretence of majesty and mockery of the imperishable ; in cities, and ports, human life was still the same as in the days of pride of Telamon and Populonia, but little changed in substance and in temper, if altered in mere outward form.

Yet, though all living mankind were his brethren, like unto him as one white bean of the fields is like another, unimproved, unpurified—nay, in some senses far more ignorant and unlovely than he—the Etrurian noble had no friend or remembrance amongst modern multitudes, and all his pomp and elegance in death, and all his tenderness for those he loved, had failed to keep him a place upon the earth ; and the weeds and the wild shrubs had covered him, even as they covered the empty hole of a dead snake.

The child, who knew nothing of the great Lydian nation that had once reigned in her Maremma, stood silent and immovable

in great awe. For a few moments her eyes beheld the form of the dead warrior; then, all in an instant, it crumbled away before her very sight, riveted in amaze upon it.

The air and the light entering with her, after exclusion for two thousand years or more, reached the oxydised armour, the recumbent corpse, and melted them back to dust. Soon, where the warrior, who looked to her but sleeping, had been stretched on his cold bed, there was nothing but a few grey ashes.

She stood motionless as though she were changed to marble; a sort of trance had fallen upon her as the golden king had faded into that heap of pallid ashes. A cloud had obscured the sun, and the feeble light that had reached the subterranean chamber had ceased to come there, the painted figures on the walls faded away in the gloom; it seemed to be already night.

She was afraid, but her fear had the sublimity of awe in it, and nothing of the feebleness of terror. Was it death? was it life? was it a god? was it a devil that was near her now?

All the words that she had heard in the church of Santa Tarsilla, and which had

no real meaning for her, thronged on her memory now. She was afraid, but she was enthralled; the horror that was upon her had both beauty and tyranny in it.

This king was dust.

All his gold had availed him nothing; when the air or the light had touched him, he and it had dissolved and perished.

He had been there one moment before, and now was gone for ever.

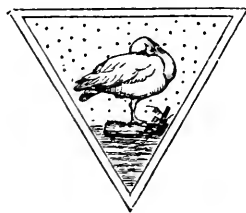
An immense wonder and an infinite pity began to drive the terror from her soul and take its place. There was his place of rest, there was his bed of stone, and he was gone, taking his treasures with him. Had they melted into the rays of the sun and gone on the wings of the wind? Why had he not taken her too? She would have been so glad to go.

The place grew darker and darker; for up above, in the world of the living, the sun was sinking to its setting into the deep-blue sea.

Absolute night enshrouded her here; the great cold of the tomb began to chill her veins and freeze her heart; for the first time in all her fearless young years she was afraid; she longed for some human voice

some touch of warm and moving life, some friendliness of animal or bird. For the ghastly dread of the unknown and of the unseen was for the first time upon her. She tried to call aloud, but she was dumb.

A heavy impenetrable darkness seemed to fall on her, and she thought as it smote her, 'this is death!' That death which Joconda had spoken of that day, which then to her had been unintelligible and without dread. Death had been here so long alone and in peace, and she had broken in upon his rest, and he in wrath had claimed her. So she thought, dully and feebly, as the darkness seemed to bend her under it as under some falling mountain, and she lost all knowledge and all sight.





CHAPTER VI.

WHEN she regained her consciousness, a slender thread of light was shining on the rocky floor. It was a ray of the risen moon. Day was quite gone, and night had come to bear death company.

She raised herself slowly upon her feet, and though her heart beat with the force of hammers, and every limb quivered with a ghostly fear, the courage inborn in her roused itself, and moved her to struggle for life and liberty. The grey dust lay behind her, the dust which was the only thing left of a human corpse and a golden treasure. But the dust to her was neither warrior nor gold ; to her the dead man had arisen at the touch of the sunbeams, and had gone out

away into the light, and had left her alone in his place.

The great fear was still upon her like frost upon a flower.

She could not understand what she had seen. She could not comprehend what place this was in which she stood. But the instinct of reviving life made her long to rise and flee ; it put strength into her limbs and courage into her veins ; she dragged herself towards the entrance, thrust herself through the narrow aperture, and forced herself once more up into the air, under the open sky.

When she saw the bushes around her and the stars above, she gave a cry of joy ; they were familiar, they were friends.

She breathed again.

She felt no fear of the fresh night, of the lonely moors, of the silence and the solitude of these marshes that stretched around. She knew them all. When the bats flew by her, and the owls, she stretched out her hand to them and laughed aloud.

After that awful silence, that intense cold, that terrible nameless burial-place, the moles burrowing in the black earth, the water-beetle blundering through the shadows, the stealthy polecat hunting rats through

the prickly *pungente*,¹ the common snipe foraging for slugs and snails amongst the sharp spines of the water-soldier, the woodcock winging his way against the wind as he likes best to do, the great plover trotting to the marsh to drink, these were all dear companions, welcome as the air.

She made her way quickly over the solitary moor down to the beach. Some far-off bell from a church far inland on the waste was tolling for vespers ; the night was clear and cold. She found her boat safe, and unmoored it and rowed backward. There was no wind, and the way seemed very long. For the first time in her life she felt terrified and feeble. The sea looked so wide and the heavens so vast.

The moon was full and of a deep gold colour ; she wondered was it the dead man's golden shield that lay in the tomb all day and at night was held up there by unseen hands ? A golden shooting-star flashed down the west ; she thought it was the dead man's vanished spear.

The dead had risen and fled.

Was he there in the lustre of the sky ?

The great fear went with her like a pur-

¹ *Scarpiurus muricata*.

suing shadow, yet an immense longing, an intense eagerness, were with her too; if only she could go where he was gone, if only she could know that mystery!

But she could only bend over her oars and send her boat through the phosphorescent calm of tranquil water. Neither sea nor sky answered her.

When she reached Santa Tarsilla, the village was all dark. It was midnight. The fishing smacks were still out, far away by many a mile, and the men with them. The women and children slept. She fastened the boat to its iron ring in the stone landing, and went slowly ashore.

On the edge of the little water-worn low pier an old woman stood and a white dog; the dog rushed to her, the woman cried angrily, 'Why give us this fright? I bid you always be in at moonrise. I have been here for hours, looking, looking, looking, while Leone howled——'

'It was not my fault,' said the child in a low tone. 'I have seen strange things.'

'Pray God you have not seen your father,' thought Joconda, as she said aloud, 'Come to the house; you must be hungry.'

'No,' said Musa; but she went with Jo-

conda homeward, and when she got there drank thirstily; she could not eat. Joconda waited for her to speak in vain.

‘What have you seen?’ she asked at last.

‘I have seen Death, and it is beautiful,’ the child answered wearily.

‘Beautiful?’ said Joconda. ‘Child, you have not yet seen what you love die! Do not speak in riddles. What have you seen?’

Musa told her what she had seen; speaking in a hushed strange voice, and with pain.

‘Is that all?’ said Joconda, when she had ended. ‘That is nothing. You stumbled on a grave. I know those people. They are underneath the soil everywhere hereabouts. We call them *buche delle fate*. They were great people once, I have heard tell, who had cities and palaces and the like, and all is covered with thistles and thorns now; they buried their gold with them, but it did them no good. There are plenty of their graves all over the country, and treasure is dug out of them. But it is not well to rob the dead. For me I would not do so. You took nothing?’

‘I? It all went away with him; went away into the air.’

‘That is folly,’ said Joconda, ‘and if you talk of it so, none will believe you; they will say you have robbed the tomb, and there will be bad work, and I am not sure to whom that waste land belongs. Say nothing. That will be best. You have seen something, surely, for you look scared, but to say the gold and the dead went into the air is folly.’

‘I say the truth,’ said the child.

‘You slept and dreamed, and I am tired. Get you to bed. It is midnight.’

‘But who were those dead people?’

‘That I do not know, and what does it matter? Poor souls—their day is done.’

‘But the earth—is it all a grave?’

‘Ay; and we shall be in it; no fear of our not having our turn; I almost wish you had brought a bit of the gold if you really did see it, not that it would have been right.’

‘Did God make men and women?’ she asked, meeting the eyes of Joconda, who answered testily—

‘For sure, and He might have made them better when He was after it.’

‘He must have been more glad when He made the coral in the deep sea, and

set the lilies in the pools,' said the child wearily.

Joconda sighed and stared.

'Aye, there is nothing to make Him glad in any of us. The wicked never cease from troubling, and the whitest souls are but greyish and spotted, like a fungus in a wood. Sometimes I have thought myself He must repent. But I talk wickedly. Have you lain in moonlight, child, that you say such odd things?'

Musa was silent.

'I think those people are my kindred,' she said under her breath to Joconda, who replied :

'Well, they may be; no one knows whence you come;' and said to herself, to excuse the lie to her conscience, 'and no one does, for I never heard tell who Serapia's people were; some said one thing and some another.'

'But how did I come to you?' said Musa, with that direct question which Joconda had always dreaded.

'I picked you up on the hills in chestnut-time,' said Joconda; and said to herself, 'and that certainly is true.'

Musa asked no more. Her thoughts

were with all those dead people under the ground, whose gold outlived them.

Her great eyes looked up through the unglazed window to red Arcturus shining in the constellation of Boötes.

‘Do the dead sleep all day in the dark in the earth and at night shine in there?’ she asked, gazing at silvery Spica hanging above the sea.

Joconda pushed her to her bed.

‘Leave the dead alone. You have just begun to live. Get you to bed, for it is late and oil is dear. If you had brought a little bit of the gold now—God forbid I should tell you to steal, but the dead are dead and it could not have harmed them.’

The child lay down and turned her face to the wall: her cheeks were wet with tears.





CHAPTER VII.

THE child never after that night spoke of what she had seen in the tomb. She shut it in her thoughts with many another thing, and did not share it. But her mind was constantly busy with these dead people, who all slept on their beds of rock and when the air touched them fled. She longed to see them, know of them, go with them.

There was no one to tell her anything. In this ancient land of theirs no one knew of the Etruscans. Strangers came and dug indeed about the Maremma, and rifled the graves that they found, this they knew, but there were no graves known of at Santa Tarsilla, and the subject had no interest for them, and was not even intelligible. In

other parts the scattered peasantry here and there made a little money as custodians of the opened tombs, and wondered to see travellers ford bridgeless streams and force a difficult way through the prickles merely to see painted caves with coffins of stone.

But there were none of these near at hand, and Santa Tarsilla knew nothing but of its own fever, its own fishing, and its own smuggling, carried on under the very eyes of the sickly coastguard in a small way, but successfully; Santa Tarsilla within a few miles of Cosa and Vetulonia knew nothing of Etruria.

That Joconda knew anything was because she was a northern woman, and so had keen use of both her eyes and ears, and coming and going to and from Grosseto through fifty long years had gathered many a quaint random scrap of information, and remembered it even when she could make but little of it.

Musa had a strong visionary fancy, though no poet read or history studied had fed it. All she had ever had to nourish it were the songs and improvisations of the foresters and mountaineers, when, with autumn and spring-time, they came into

Santa Tarsilla on their way to and from the woods and hills ; rough men and wild, but often eloquent, making their lutes sound sweetly by the side of the moonlit sea, or rolling out strophe and antistrophe, unconscious of their harmonies, as the wave broke upon the sand.

Her fancy, untrained but strong, like the wild 'mother of the woods' that brought forth its blossoms unseen over the waste around, made of the dead Etruscans her own nation, and of their subterranean graves her temple.

'You live too much with these dead people, child,' said Joconda to her.

'They do me no harm,' said Musa. 'The living make me angry often, and I strike them sometimes; the dead make me ashamed that I am ever wicked.'

'They were wicked enough themselves, most like,' grumbled Joconda. 'I will be bound men and women have never differed much.'

'They do me good,' said Musa; and she said no more.

They were sacred to her. She could not have put into words what she felt, but it was very strong in her, this sense of

tenderness, of kinship, of reverence, with which the lonely tombs moved her.

Musa in her utter ignorance would not for her life have robbed of an ounce of gold or a vase of clay these dead sleepers of a sleep of three thousand years.

She was jealous over them, she worshipped them, they were her idols; let others have their saints as they would, she had never cared for the saints; she cared for these ghostly hosts who filled the under chambers of the earth and waited so calmly, so patiently, with the oak and the thorn and the myrtle growing above their heads.

On all the earth there is in truth nothing so intensely sad, so intensely solemn, as the thought of the buried cities that lie with their buried millions under the hurrying feet of living multitudes, or lost in the green silences where orchids bloom, and the thorn of Christ puts forth its golden flowers, and the dragon-flies spread gossamer wings above the fritillaria and fraxinella. As scholars know, she knew nothing of them; but as poets feel for them, she felt.

Whenever Musa had a day of freedom, fascinated by her very fear, she went to the spot on the moor where she had found the

sleeping warrior. The place had awe and seduction for her stronger than anything else, even stronger than the sea. She felt that the earth held a mystery, a whole inner world of mute motionless creatures.

Of death she had never thought except on that one day when Joconda had spoken of dying. She had seen the dull black bier go by borne by the beccamorti; she had seen the torches flare as the dead went home, and knew that they were put away underground, and wondered that they were not thrown into the sea. Children, who had been at play on the shore beside her one week, the next were dead of fever, and were buried; that she knew very well, but she had never thought about it. These skeletons on their beds of rock were the first creatures that made her think of the fate that waits for every living thing.

Was he dead indeed, that hero robed in golden beauty, who had passed out under the stars and been seen no more? Then death could not be terrible, she thought; to lie still undisturbed till you went out to the stars and the clouds, that was so sweet and grand, no one need fear it.

She conquered her first terror and went

again and again to the tomb. There was the couch of rock, the floor, the walls, the faintly coloured banquet, but the hero returned no more. When the day was bright and noon was high she would go down out of its heat and light into the gloom of that cold chamber and sit upon the bed that the dead had left and watch, always vaguely and wistfully, hoping he would return to tell her all the secrets of the grave, all the glories of the skies.

Beyond this chamber in which the Lucumo and his treasures had lain, an open stone door led to another room of the same dimensions, and from that again, beyond other doors of stone, opened out two cells, divided by a wall of the natural rock. In all these three there were, as she saw, not then but in after days, stone benches and stone chairs, dust-covered. The dust had once been human bones.

Here, too, there were painted jars and bowls, bronze candelabra and utensils of beautiful workmanship and exquisite form, ivory and enamel toys, glass and gold necklaces and clasps and brooches, amber amulets, and jewellery and rings. The walls and the roofs also of these tombs

were painted. In one, Mantus and Mania held dread court of judgment ; on another the twelve gods sat in council ; here the lotus and the bullrush sprang to life, and Etruscan boys danced and leapt and strung the lyre ; there Cupa and Horta sported amidst flowers, and Vertumnus was crowned with fruit.

The graves had doubtless all belonged to the same family, that of the great Lucumo, whose skeleton and armour had melted and vanished at the first touch of air. Possibly he had been one of the forgotten kings of the Tyrrhene people ; certainly he had been some mighty warrior-prince, since he had had the *corona etrusca* about his casque, and the eagle with spread wings upon his ivory sceptre.

The shape and sentiment of Greek art were visible on all the ornaments of his burial chamber ; the painted vases were all of Greek taste, polychrome and decorated with divine figures or groups of fruits or flowers ; such vases as are oftener found in Athens than Etruria. Probably this necropolis had been contemporary with, or somewhat earlier than, Alexander of Macedon.

The tombs had been undiscovered alike

by Roman or Gothic greed of gold, and modern science had not dreamed of their existence, even whilst busied in the excavations of Cyclopean Cosa, near at hand, southward, on the same seashore. Doubtless other sepulchres adjoined these, made under the same low swell of friable sandstone cliffs and hillocks, but any others were grown over by brushwood, and engulfed in earth disturbed by volcanic action, no trace of them, or of any opening that might have led to them, was ever found, even though in after days Musa searched diligently and often. They were lost as utterly as the vast labyrinth of Porsenna is lost ; only the janitor's room had been left some little connection with the upper earth, and outer soil, by the passage of wild animals, who had found through the ever-open door of the entrance-cell a lair of safety.

Their lonely territory was southward of the great lake that the Romans called *Lacus Aprilis*, along whose shore the Aurelian Way once was made ; it was northward of the weird rocks of *Monte Argentaro*, and shared in the rich *sylva* and *flora* which the central part of the *Maremma* possesses, in that grander and virginal aspect

which the province between the rivers of Ombrone and Fiora owes to the forests of pine, of ilex, of cork, of oak, of manna-ash, and of locust-tree which clothe the slopes beneath the Apennines; to the wilderness of evergreen trees and shrubs that cover in their verdure and dusky gloom the ruins of Roman roads, of Latin castles, of Tyrrhene towns and sepulchres; to the innumerable pools and streams and lakes which are hidden away under impenetrable thickets, and known only to the sultan-hen and the wild duck, the nocturnal plover and the common coot. Away to the southward stretched vast grasslands, peopled solely by the melancholy buffalo, covered in spring with the elysian asphodel; and the dreary, solemn, almost treeless moors, walled in from the east by sombre mountain heights, and covering beneath their soil lost Ansedonia and perished Cosa, and the tombs of the Tarquins, and the moats and ramparts of the once mighty Ardea, and many another perished greatness of which the very name had been forgotten even in Virgil's generation.

Between the moors and the sea stretched all along the coast a yellow sandy beach, or a wide algæ-strewn swamp, or a rocky

stony waste bearing the traces still of the ancient Consular way.

From the hills and mounds of sandstone, covered with mountain-box and juniper bushes, that swelled up low and long in a ridge that traversed the part of the moorland which she so especially haunted, the child, looking north and south, could see the whole coast-line from the deep semicircular bay to the eastward, enclosed between Populonia and the Cape of Troja, and facing the peaks of Elba, to the south-westward where Telamone had been a crowded port, and where once the great *Argo* herself had anchored, yet where now even the little coasters, that drew but two feet of water, often ran aground, and dull Orbetello sheltered a dreary life of sickly soldiers and of sullen coastguards and of listless people picking the salt crystals from the soil.

Over that blue sea, where once the Argonauts sailed, and the Etruscan pirates hunted the Latin galleys, and the merchant vessels went out from the grand and busy ports laden with the Lydian wool, the iron-work that Rome deemed of even more worth than men, the silver and the gold chasings

that Greece eagerly bought and could not equal, the yellow grain that made Maremma then, as now, the granary of Italy, over that blue sea there still came stately ships bound for Athens or for Asia, fleets of fishing craft with their lateen sails curved and white in the summer sun, brigs laden to the water-line with cargo and steering straight for Africa. But on the land, the wondrous, mysterious, memory-haunted land, where the lost cities lay under the forests, and the labyrinths of endless cemeteries wound beneath the sand and turf, there scarce any sign of human life was ever to be seen, save when a mounted shepherd on his wild and shaggy horse rode in amongst the herds of buffalo—a true son still of the fierce Etruscan *pastori* whom even Rome confessed none could war with and none could win without.

True, not very far off there were the ironworkers of Follonica beating the ore of Elba into shape, in the only vigorous work to be found along the coast-line, true sons of the Etruscan Sethlans, who were said to be rough, coarse, ill company enough if met away from their sweltering furnaces. But of the smiths of Follonica she knew

no more than she knew of the Etruscan Vulcan.

Another year went by, and the girl grew taller and stronger, and had Santa Tarsilla counted young men amidst its population, they would have looked full well and often at that dark yet luminous face that was by old Joconda's side in the morning mist and the troubled sunlight of the dull church at time of mass. Joconda kept her close, and encouraged her to be silent. Joconda was not loquacious like those chatterers of the seaboard, and she always thought that no harm could come from holding your tongue, though much might come from wagging it.

At fifteen, Musa, as she was now oftenest called, and would be called in Santa Tarsilla if she lived in it a century, was a noble-looking and beautiful creature, with pride in her glance, and more still of shyness, with a bearing royal in its calmness and its freedom, and an untamed and sombre spirit in her blood.

When old Andreino saw her at his tiller or from his boat's side looked down at her as she lifted her bronze-hued, loose-curled head, like a young god's, out of the waters,

he would say to himself, 'that suits her better than distaff and missal; there is the courage of sea-lions in her.'

But going to mass by Joconda's side, with her cross on her breast and her palm-branch in her hand, at Easter-time, she looked but a girl, simple, silent, docile, wise in some things beyond her age; yet she seemed out of keeping with the place and with the people; and the old woman would glance at her, and think, 'would not one know there was wild blood there?' and feel her own heart heavy as she looked.

She had been brought up in the best ways Joconda knew; taught cleanliness, truthfulness, and industry, could spin well and be useful in the house, though she hated confinement under a roof, and the moment she was set free rushed to the air like a bird loosed from a cage.

Whether she had affection in her or not, Joconda could not tell; the only creature she ever caressed was the Molossus dog.

As for learning, she had little. She could read slowly, and she could write very badly; this was all that she had been forced to do. But she could, as she said, steer and row like the best of them; she could take

the helm of a felucca and bring it safely in over the algæ-heaps and dangerous shallows of the choked harbour; she could fling a net with force and skill, though when it was full of shining, struggling little fish, she often liked to loose it and let them all slide back whence they came; and furthermore she could sing all the *rispetti* and *stornelli* of the Maremmano shore to the throbbing strings of an old lute, which Joconda's sons in their short lives had loved to make music with, when they came home from the coral fishing. The chords of that lute and the clear voice from her young throat were the only melody that ever enlivened the damp hot nights, when the scirocco was filling the sorry houses with sand and the haze on the sea hid the green Giglio isle.

Even her singing took its character from the melancholy and abandonment that characterised the land and the water, and it was rarely that she chose other themes than the passionate laments of the provincial canzoni, for those who go far out to sea at risk of life, or for the faithless mountaineer who leaves *amara Maremma* without a sigh or a backward look, or than, more tragic and more terrible still, that tale of Pia Tolomei,

whose despair has echoed through so many centuries, and whose history still often makes the theme of their song to the mariners and the marsh labourers of the Orbetellano, of Massa Marittima, and of the Patrimony of S. Peter, as the lower part of the province is still called.

But when she sang of love and all its sorrows, she knew nothing of the meaning of the words; and she liked better songs of war and death. When she sang

Tortorella c'ha perso la compagna
Di giorno e notte va melanconesca,

she did not understand why any one should grieve to be alone; when she sang

Come volete faccia che non pianga
Sapendo che da voi devo partire?
E tu, bello, in Maremma, ed io'n montagna,
Questa partenza mi farà morire,

it seemed to her but poor and feeble nonsense. And yet her voice gave intensest passion and longing to the words; and when she sang

Andai a bere alla fonte d'Amore,

Joconda shook her head and thought with wistful pain,—

‘ Ah, you will drink indeed, one day ; drink so deep that you will drown ! ’

Joconda was always anxious and troubled lest anyhow she had missed the way, and done less than she might in the fulfilling of Saturnino’s trust. The man was but a galley-slave, a thief, a murderer ; but Joconda was faithful to him as though he had been a king.

She was always anxious. The Mastarna, of whom there were none living save this child and the galley-slave, had all died by violent deaths, the deaths of hunters, of smugglers, or of brigands ; of Serapia’s people she knew nothing, but report had spoken of that dead woman as of a beautiful light voluptuous fool. From both sides there was dangerous heritage—dark precedent. The old woman, with her tender conscience and her upright soul, was always harassed with fear.

Musa had a great skill at rythmical improvisations.

Silent at other times, with a silence that was in strong contrast with the loquacity of those around her, she would at times, when the fit fell on her, recite in the *terza rima* or the more difficult *ottavo*, poems of her own

on every theme which came before her eye : poems that the next hour she forgot as utterly as the nightingale forgets no doubt the trills that he sets rippling through the night under the myrtle and the bay leaves. It is not an uncommon gift ; in country places where the dreary levelling parrot-learning of the towns has not touched and destroyed the natural original powers of the people, this trick of musical language, of words that burn, and paint their pictures with fire of passionate and just recital, still refreshes and adorns the life of the labourer of the cornlands and the fishing villages and the old grey farm-houses, set high on a ledge of Carrara or Sabine hills and the fragrant orange thickets, and the sombre calm woods of Sardinia or Apulia. Where the Italian has not been dulled, stiffened, corroded, debased by the levelling and impoverishing influences of modern civilisation, there is he always classic, eloquent, ardent, graceful in body and mind ; there is he still half a Greek, and wholly a sylvan creature.

Musa, with her old mandoline with its ivory keys across her knee, and her brown hand every now and then calling the sleeping music from its strings, had moments of

inspiration like any pythoress of old, and at such times her eyes flashed, her lips grew eloquent, her colour came and went, her voice rose in cadence that stirred the sluggish sickly souls around her with joy and with terror. All the fire and the force that were in her blood came out of prison in those recitations, and, listening to her, Joconda thought, with a shudder, 'that is Saturnino who speaks so, of love, and hate, and war, and death!'

A thousand memories that were not of her life, yet seemed of her remembrance, thronged on the child at such hours. She seemed to hear the clash of arms, the roll of artillery, the shrieks of slaughtered children, the hiss of the hot blood pouring out as the cold steel plunged in through flesh and sinew; strife, combat, violence, fierce courage, ghastly death, all seemed familiar to her, and she sang of them as Tasso sang of strife before Jerusalem that never his eyes looked on in life. Higher and higher, stronger and stronger, her voice would rise as the rhyme rushed from her lips, and the lute under her fingers would scream and sob like a suffering thing, and a great fear would come over all her listeners; and when, all suddenly, she stopped, pale, breathless, with dilated eyes—

the eyes of those who see what is not upon the earth—the neighbours would steal away alarmed and yet entranced, and Joconda would cross herself and think: ‘All the dead that her father slew seem to cry out to her.’

It was not very often that she could be induced to take up the mandoline, or show this power to others; but song and narrative flavour the daily bread of all households of the south, like the onion, or the melon; and even in these languid, naked, fever-haunted shores there was always some knot of tired seamen, of weary women, to gather in the shade of a wall, or under the hulk of a stranded boat, and beguile the time with *rispetti* and recitative.

Such as these would coax her, or bribe her with some carnation flower, or some nautilus shell, to come amongst them, and conjure up, to thrill their sluggish veins, some tragedy of sea or land, some vision of love or death. So she sang of things she knew not, and in the sultry evenings, when the skies were livid and seemed hard as metal, and the sea swayed heavily under the heat like a flood of molten lead, the drought and the drouth and the shivering sickness and the parched poisonous land were all

forgotten as they hearkened to that voice of hers which seemed, even as the nightingales' voices do when many of them sing together, to be like the sound of silver cymbals smiting one another.

Joconda discouraged and disliked this power of improvisation, this inborn melody.

'Who knows where it may lead her one day,' she thought; 'and if she became one of those singing-women who give their throats for gold, and show themselves half stripped upon the stage of the world, then had I better have left her to be eaten by the rats under the pine-trees of her father's lair.'

For Joconda was a Puritan at heart, having in her by her mother the Waldensian blood; and she did her best to discourage the gifts of voice in Saturnino's child. But nature is stronger than counsel, and Musa rhymed and sang. Knowing nothing of the metrical laws that govern the sonnet, she yet imitated these so well that she strung many a sonnet like a row of pearls; only never hardly could she keep the text unchanged, her fancy varied, and her spoken poems varied also as the quail's call varies, when he cries across the waving grass to his mate.

'Sing the same as yesterday,' her neigh-

bours sometimes would say to her ; and she would answer : ‘ Can you call yesterday’s wind back, or the clouds of last night, can you gather them together this morning ? I can only sing what comes to me.’

Under other influences it would have become genius, this facile power of stirring the brains and hearts of others with sound ; but here it remained only a gift of verse as many had, though fresher and more eloquent than most. There was no food for it, except a strophe of the ‘ *Gerusalemme Liberata*,’ a story from the ‘ *Furioso*,’ or the ‘ *Morgante Maggiore*,’ passed from mouth to mouth of the people.

Once she found in a drawer a torn and yellow transcript of the sonnets of Petrarca, copied in a crabbed hand by some poor scholar of the past century ; it was the dearest treasure that she had ; it was her only book. She read with trouble and slowly at the best of times ; but by degrees she learned these sonnets all by heart through dint of going over them so often, and the stained rough yellow leaves were sacred to her as the Holy Grail to a knight. She knew nothing as to who Petrarca had been, nothing of Vacluse, or of the entry into Rome ; but

she loved those 'liquid numbers' with all her soul, and in her thoughts he was vaguely blended with the dead hero of the tomb.

So she dreamed the hours away, whilst her bodily strength laboured at the crank of the waterwheel, at the mounds of seaweed, at the sickle, with which she cut the wild oats for the mule, at the heavy sails which she dragged over the sands for Joconda to mend. So she never saw the lads who came with the coasters, and who would fain have had play or flattery with her in the evening-time, when the tarred ropes lay idle over the sea-wall, and their tartanas anchored in the weed-choked, sand-filled bay; and they grew angry, and hooted after her, 'Musoncella!' and turned their thoughts to Marianina, the pilot Giano's daughter, who had yellow hair, and red-brown eyes, and was esteemed a beauty, and kept her pink and white skin safe by going up out of the heat every summer to the house of an aunt who lived high on the Volterrian hills, although Giano's daughter at her best was, beside the lustrous colour of Musa's beauty, as a pale aster in September's sun is beside the glow of the autumnal rose.

But Giano's daughter, Mariannina, smiled

and listened and flirted, and had a merry word and a bashful blush for each of them ; and in Musa they found a restive, silent, scornful creature ; for what do young sailors, or landsmen either, want with a girl who only sees Laura's dead lover, and has no eyes at all for them and their *fiesta* bravery ?

Throughout Maremma, where love plays fast and loose, and the sower of the corn is seldom the reaper of it, and the hunter of one autumn is rarely the same as another—in Maremma, where the passions are lava and the faith is thistle-down,—the boldest and the lightest would never have dared an amorous word to the Musoncella.

There was a straight, far-away look in her great blue-black eyes, and a curve on her red lips that would have scared them, even had any of those passers-by had time to tarry and see what a rare and strange flower was growing up in the stony, reedy sands of the dreary world-forgotten place. And besides, there was Joconda, who always banged the door with scant ceremony, or grumbled a morose good-morrow, if she saw any human being looking twice at the child whom she had called after Mary the Penitent. Joconda was always afraid for the future.

There was the galley-slave on Gorgona, and there was the wild blood in the storm-bird. The only good, she thought, she could wish for the daughter of Saturnino was to live without sin in this desolate spot, unseen, unknown, with little more soul in her than there was in the stout shore thistle, that neither sands nor sea could swamp.

‘So, the saints will pluck her to themselves at last,’ thought Joconda; and the dreariness, the lovelessness, the hopelessness of such an existence did not occur to her, because age, which has learned the solace and sweetness of peace, never remembers that to youth peace seems only stagnation, inanition, death.

The exhausted swimmer, reaching the land, falls prone on it, and blesses it; but the out-going swimmer, full of strength, spurns the land, and only loves the high-crested wave, the abyss of the deep sea.

There were seventy-one years between the souls of Joconda and the child who slept in her bed, sat at her board, and knelt before her cross. They were too many for sympathy to bridge them, and though she loved the child, behind the love was always fear: the human fear of the tiger’s cub.

Meanwhile Andreino, who was a shrewd and sagacious person, had other schemes for her future; he liked the child, and he liked still better the thought of the good store of gold and silver pieces that rumour assigned to the woman of Savoy. He had a ricketty, ague-shaking little great-grandson of eighteen, with a pretty, sickly face, who lived with his father at a wineshop in a little seaport town in Apulia. 'Why not get the girl for the lad,' he thought.

'And they could live with me,' mused this disinterested old man; 'and she is stronger than many a boy, and loves steering and rowing, and would go out to the night-fishing like any man among them. It would be but kind to speak of it to Joconda.'

So he went and spoke of it with his pipe in his mouth one day that Joconda was sitting in the shade of her house wall mending a sail, for she was never idle. Joconda gave him few words in answer.

'One does not mate a trailing weed with a young oak,' she said with calm contempt, having well in her mind's eye Andreino's sickly and shaking descendant; and though he talked his best for the chief part of two

hours, he did not come any nearer towards changing her convictions.

‘She is a crafty, crabbed soul,’ thought her neighbour. ‘Maybe she has some one in Savoy——’

At that moment Musa came in sight.

‘We were talking of marriage for you,’ said Andreino with a grim smile, as she drew near them.

Musa looked at him a little perplexedly under her straight brows, then her grave face laughed.

‘Marriage! I know what that is: it is for the woman to stay at home and spin while the man is at sea, and to go out and rake wood and salt while he is drinking at the wine shop. That is what it is; it is not for me.’

The old fisherman laughed.

‘It is not only that. There are——’

‘Hold your tongue, Andreino,’ said Joconda. ‘It is oftenest only that or worse. The child need not think of it for many a day.’

‘Men will think of it,’ said the old sailor, ‘and you have a pretty penny, and it would be well to find a decent lad.’

‘When I show the penny the lads will

come like flies to wine, never fear,' said Joconda grimly. 'The child has no such thoughts. Let her be.'

Andreino went away grumbling. He liked to act the part of the *padrone d' amore*, though the sickly and scant population of the coast gave him little scope for the taste, and he had thought to taunt and tease the woman of Savoy into proving to him how many of those pretty *amorini*, good solid coins, were in the pitcher under the hearth, or the bucket sunk at the bottom of the well, or the hole in the brick behind the mule's manger, or wherever it might be that the savings of her long life were kept.

Joconda, left alone with the girl, looked at her a little wistfully.

'Child, you are handsome,' she said at last. 'That old cracked chatterer said true. Some one may want to marry you.'

'Yes,' said Musa, indifferently.

'Though there is not a soul here, still sometimes they come—Lucchese, Pistoiese, what not—they come as they go; they are a faithless lot; they love all winter, and while the corn is in the ear it goes well, but after harvest—phew!—they put their gains in their pockets and they are off and away back

to their mountains. There are broken hearts in Maremma when the threshing is done.'

'Yes,' said Musa again.

It was nothing to her, and she heeded but little.

'Yes, because men speak too lightly and women hearken too quickly; that is how the mischief is born. With the autumn the mountaineers come. They are strong and bold; they are ruddy and brown; they work all day, but in the long nights they dance and they sing; then the girl listens. She thinks it is all true, though it has all been said before in his own hills to other ears. The winter nights are long, and the devil is always near; when the corn goes down and the heat is come there is another sad soul the more, another burden to carry, and he—he goes back to the mountains. What does he care? Only when he comes down into the plains again he goes to another place to work, because men do not love women's tears. That is how it goes in Maremma.'

'Yes,' said Musa for a third time.

'Child, do not let a man touch you till you have had the blessing of Church upon you. Remember that, Whilst I am here,

if a man come, it will be the worse for him if he come not honestly. I am tough still. But when I am gone there will be no one, for Andreino is but a gawky gossip full of tales. Promise me that; let no man touch you till the Church has blessed you. Promise that.'

Musa at last was astonished and startled. A warmth of blood came over the delicate brown of her face and throat.

'I promise,' she said quickly. 'But I do not see any men; I do not want them.'

'Some one will come,' muttered Joconda. 'Some one always comes. Swear me that by the image you wear.'

The child kissed the gold Madonnina that hung about her throat, and said, 'I swear it—but a promise is the same.'

'With you I think it is,' said Joconda. 'But, Lord, what are you yet? A bird not out of nest—a bud all folded up. You do not know what you will be in a year or two. And now that you have sworn you will remember.'

'I will remember,' said Musa.

Joconda was silent, recollecting, as she twirled her flax, on what the Maremma had always said of Saturnino—that he was true

to a plighted word through good and ill, and when he swore on his Madonnina abode by his oath, whether it were for blood-guiltiness or for the sparing of blood.

‘She is Saturnino’s own child,’ thought Joconda. She was his child. To the mind of Joconda that one fact made this calm young life seem like a fair garden outspread on a volcano’s side. There were the budding lilies indeed, and the half-shut roses, but there was the lava stream beneath them that any day might rise in fire.

‘If only I could be always here,’ she thought, poor soul, fancying that she would find some force to stay the lava with the uplifted crucifix. But she knew she could not be always here; she was eighty-six years old this brilliant day of San Zenone, when the light and the fragrance of spring were cautiful, even in cursed Maremma.

When Musa was asleep that night and all the little place was still, Joconda, behind her barred shutters and bolted doors, by the light of her lantern looked at her little hoard, which was kept under a stone in the paved floor of her kitchen.

She counted it. It was but little, though the fancy of Santa Tarsilla made it much.

Fortunes are not made by weaving hemp and mending sails.

There were some score of gold Grand Ducal coins, and some handfuls of Papal silver ones ; that was all. Before the child had come to her she had thought the money would do to bury her, and buy some masses for her soul. Now the child was there she said to herself, ‘ my soul can do well enough without masses ; she must have it all ; ’ and caused to be scrawled in Grosseto, by a friend, on a scrap of stamped paper to make it good, these words of formal bequest :—

‘ All this is for the child Maria Penitente, whom they call Musa or the Musoncella, and the parish may bury my body, and my soul will be with God, who will do what He likes with it. *Deus exaudit nos.* ’

This, which had been written at her own dictation, she wrapped carefully round the money, and with a sigh replaced it in the hole, and set the stone down over it. It was but little to be the only plank between a girl, and hunger, and thirst, and homelessness, and shame.

Yet over the face of Joconda a grim smile fluttered as she put out her lantern. ‘ Andreino thinks I have a pretty penny,’

she thought ; ‘ and he would like to sell me his ricketty great-grandson that shakes with ague like a jelly-fish in a lobster-pot ! ’

The smile faded as she laid herself down to sleep ; she knew all the niggardly self-seeking ways of the people, and had diverted herself with them through all the silent years of her life on these shores ; but they were sorry neighbours to whom to leave a solitary child for care and for mercy.

‘ Well, the good God will be with her,’ sighed Joconda in the formula of her faith. But she was a woman whom a formula could but half console.

Deity at his best was very far away, and always silent.

She would gladly have had those pieces under the pavement more by a hundredfold.

She glanced wistfully at the figure of the girl ere she put out her light, as Musa lay on the rough bed scarcely covered, with her slender straight round limbs glistening like some golden-hued marble, and her head hung downward in deep rest, as a flower hangs when full of dew.

She thought once of her own people, but she knew nothing about them. More than sixty years had gone by since she had come

down the mountain paths out of the mist, and said farewell to the great snow-peaks, the forests of pine, the green glacier waters tumbling through the ravine. She had never seen them since, nor any of her kindred. Letters had come once, now and then, in two or three years' time, but that was long ago, long ago; she had had but two brothers, and they had forgotten her, when once she was married, and far away over the southern sea.

It was of no use to think of them.

‘Never hearken to the voice of a man that bears you away,’ she would say to the unconscious child, as her memories drifted to that time, so long ago, when she had left her Alps for her lover’s shores. He had been a true lover, indeed, that dark-eyed Marenmano, but he had perished before her eyes, and his boat had come in on the surf keel upward, and all the widow’s jointure he had left her had been sorrow and disease and barren years, dry from grief as the shores were dry with the sand-bearing scirocco. If she had never known him, she would no doubt have lived and died amidst the peace and plenty of those Alpine farms.

‘Love is a cruel thing,’ she thought;

and the next day she brought out their few scant letters, of which the latest was thirty years old, and bade Musa read them aloud to her.

The child read them with some difficulty; they were short and grave, such letters as busy farmers would write on a winter's night when the *châlet* was blocked in snow, and their mountain side seemed severed by a wall of ice from all the world. Joconda listened, and said never a word. Her heart was full. Herself, she could not read, but she looked at the signatures, Anton Sanctis, Joachim Sanctis; and it seemed once more as though she were fifteen years old, and her brothers were breasting the face of the rocks and calling to her where she stood above, with the red and white cow Dorothea. She had never spoken of her youth to the child before. She spoke now, in few words, but tenderly.

Musa, with the old faded yellow ill-writ letters lying on her knee, sat in the sultry pestilential mists of a summer day in Maremma, and heard of that land of coolness, of rest, of forest stillness, of glacier solitude. It seemed strange to her, and very wonderful.

‘Are they all dead, do you think?’ she said, sharing Joconda’s vague anxiety.

‘Ay, for sure, they are all dead,’ said Joconda, with a smothered sigh; and in the dust, in the glare, in the furnace-blast of the scirocco that is like a curse from the mouth of a fever-stricken man, she told her beads and muttered to herself:

‘Dear heaven! for the feel of the snow in the air, for the smell of the great pine woods in the wind—what I would give, what I would give! But I have nothing to give; I am old and a fool; and they are dead, my brothers.’

To be sure they were dead; dead many a year, no doubt, with the cross set at their headstones, about the little chapel under the crest of the mountain; the little chapel that she remembered so well, lying so high that the clouds bathed it, and the snow scarce melted till June. And she would herself lie here in the sand and the sun.

During this hot summer season the thought of them, her two only brothers, grew stronger and stronger upon her; and as she drove one day into Grosseto, the remembrance grew so vivid that she went to a scrivener and said to him—

‘Write me a long letter and a good one, and word for word as I tell it you; and write it so that it can go over the sea and the hills without harm; and when it is written address it clearly and in a bold hand to Anton and Joachim Sanctis, above the Val de Cogne, in the kingdom of Savoy.’

As she dictated so the scrivener wrote, and with her own hand Joconda dropped the letter into the bag of the post, as it went out of Grosseto that evening time at sunset.

Anton and Joachim, if alive, would be very old men, for they had been older than she by some years, but that scarcely occurred to her. She always saw them as she had seen them last, bold mountaineers and farmers, stalwart and handsome, angry at her wedding with the Italian from over the seas, and bidding her and him a reluctant and sullen God-speed as the mules jolted down the steep ways into the valley, and the glaciers of Grandcou and Monei and the peak of the beautiful Grivola were lost for ever to her sight.

‘Ay, I had better have stayed there,’ she thought, with a wistful sigh, as she dropped her letter in the post and made

her way through the pale dusty haze of a summer twilight in sickly Grosseto.

The memories of the mountain winds, the deep still woods, the crystal clearness of the cold bright air, the forest silence on those heights where the sole visitants were, the eagle and the vulture, came back upon her mind amidst the heat, the dust, the heaviness, the nauseousness of the atmosphere of the sea-shore in Maremma.

‘Surely I am near my end,’ she thought, knowing that when the thoughts of youth return fresh as the scent of new-gathered blossoms to the tired old age which has so long forgot them, the coming of Death is seldom very distant; and she jolted home behind the mule, falling asleep at intervals while the beast took his homeward course unerringly, and when she awoke with a start and saw the level and mournful plains around her, she did not for the moment understand, and began to call Rosa, and Nix, and Dorothea, the cows that she had had at pasture on the Alps when she had been some fifteen summers old!

‘Lord, their bones lie bleaching fifty years!’ she said to herself, knowing her own folly; yet she could see them all; the

dun, the black, the pretty red and white, thrusting their noses through the lush Alpine grass, and lowing their welcome to her through the Alpine mists of morning. 'When one leaves one's cradle-land one does ill,' she thought wearily, as the sea gleamed in her sight, pale, smooth, ghastly, in the light of the moon; the bottomless grave that held her dead.

Each day after that she began wistfully to hope that she might hear something from Savoy. The postman came over the plains and along the shores very irregularly to Santa Tarsilla. If it were not the soldiers or the priest who had a letter, no one else ever saw such a thing save once, when Andreino had been known to have one announcing the death of a son of his, who kept a wine-shop far up the Riviera, where the orange, and the lemon, and the fragrant olive grow together by the edge of the sea. Joconda began to look wistfully for the dusty jaded figure of the tired *postino* coming across the sand, but she looked in vain.

The weeks came and went; the drought became greater; the plain grew yellower and the sky greyer; the air was like a

furnace, and over the water there hung always a livid fog of heat. But she got no answer.

‘No doubt they are dead,’ she thought, and felt the sadder and the lonelier for the thought.





CHAPTER VIII.

MEANWHILE, for sympathy Musa went elsewhere. She turned to those who had been dead three thousand years if one.

She had never spoken of her discovery ; the secret was sacred to her and sweet ; she loved the moors and the city of the dead that was beneath them. All the leisure that she had she spent there. With the help of Andreino she had made, at last, for herself a rough little boat out of drift-timbers lying about, and she rowed herself hither and thither in it : it was not very seaworthy, but that had no terrors for her ; she could swim like a fish. She visited her Etruscan burial-place with each fast-day that came round, when the crisp snow of December made the marsh ice and the world white,

as when the suns of August sucked up the venom from the emerald soaking swamp.

She found the other spacious chambers connected with the first grave; tombs with stone biers around the walls, and the same strange fantastic paintings on the wall, and many earthenware cups and trays, and some lamps and goblets of gold. These last had not been oxydised as the first that she had seen, and therefore did not vanish at her touch; no doubt because, though she could see no ray of light into these inner chambers, some air had always come, for the dead were not there, not even their bones and ashes; these had long ago gone forth on the breath of the wind, as her warrior king had done.

To any scholar, or even to a traveller unscholarly, these tombs would have seemed capable enough of simple explanation; but to her they were as an enchanted city, as a world apart, as a thing given to herself from some unseen power that set the planets rolling, and made the storm arise and sweep bare the sea.

When the bare cold rocks blocked her passage, she felt very sure that beyond it, though she might not behold further, were

all the other kingdoms of the dead, all the hosts over whom the king, who had vanished in the light of the stars, once had reigned.

The upper world, that bore the oaks and the grain, the honeysuckle and the holy-thorn, became almost nothing to her ; it was but as a mere crust above the true world, the world where the dead in their millions slept and awaited—what?—she did not know, but she felt she would wish to wait with them for ever, rather than be one in that sordid, sickly, little living world she knew, with its greed over a haul of fish, its savage quarrels over a copper-piece, its worry, its weariness, its wailing, its beds of sickness, and its hearts of stone.

To whosoever dwells in an ideal world the world of men and women seems but a poor thing ; and Musa began to dwell in one—she, whose father had seen no beauty save in a scarlet lip, a narrow poignard, a sack of gold, a pool of blood.

The little that Joconda had said of the nation of dead, instead of allaying the fever of her fancy, inflamed it.

‘Do they tell of these dead people in books?’ she asked Joconda once, who answered :

‘Aye; all lies come out of books, I believe, and some truth too, they say. For my part, a book was always a thing I thought best put in the priest’s hands, and left there.’

Musa grew diligent in her endeavours to read well and rapidly. But nothing did she find of the dead people. All that she had to read in were stories of the saints, and the proclamations about taxes and other annoyances that were posted up on the piers of Santa Tarsilla.

‘Who has got books?’ she wondered.

No one at all in her world.

She went back to the world of the dead, and imagined all that she would have liked to find in the books. Imagination without culture is crippled and moves slowly; but it can be pure imagination, and rich also, as folk-lore will tell the vainest.

There was that in the silence, the solitude, and the sense of ownership which made the subterranean sepulchres beautiful and beloved to the child; if any other had broken in on them, their spell would have been weakened; she grew familiar with the strange dancers on the walls, the strange creatures, and flowers, and symbols; she found ornaments

on the floors and on the stone biers, but she only looked at them reverently; everything was only waiting: the dead people would come back.

The grey shadows of these chambers grew dearer to her than the light of spring or summer in the thickets or on the sea. Their intense stillness seemed sweeter than even the sound of the waves she had so well loved. She returned to her home with sorrow; there were the jar of shrill voices, the hissing of oil in frying-pans, the cry of hurt animals, the rattle of copper vessels, the babble of sickly women.

An Italian village is never lovely.

There is always so much dust, so much dirt; there is so much stink of oil and sickly smell of silkworms; the dogs and cats and the fowls and mules look hungry and scared. The children play in mud or sand with some live thing they torture; even amidst the hills or beside the pastures they are always marring the beauty of the country thus. By the palsied shores of the Maremma this squalor, this cruelty, this unloveliness, were a thousandfold more painful.

When she went back to them from the silence and solemnity of the Etruscan moor-

lands they hurt her with a sudden sense of their unfitness and their hatefulness.

‘It is better with the dead,’ she thought, when she went reluctantly home to the low-lying shore when the flat roofs of Santa Tarsilla were white and black under the moon.

When a certain Etruscan tomb was broken open in Italy, and one of those necklaces of fine gold that no known work can surpass for skill was found in the grave, a duchess, still living, put the dead woman’s ornament on her own throat, and danced in it on that night.

Musa never so offended the dust. She would as soon have rifled the Madonna’s altar as have touched their jewels.

She let all the gold and the earthenware lie or stand where she had found it, where the mourners had placed it when the bones had been laid there; and although in one of the empty biers there were golden chains and golden grasshoppers, and a girdle of gold such as might well tempt a girl to put them above her linen boddice and about her woollen kirtle, she let them lie—she whose father had snatched gold wherever he saw it.

She spent many an hour in loneliness,

sitting in the twilight of the tombs, studying the figures on the walls till they seemed alive to her, and thinking, not clearly, but dreamily ; as the ox thinks in the meadow-heats of noon, as the deer thinks, and the dog, and the great eagle, when he sways on an oak-bough, and looks down through ten fathom deep of azure air and mist of sun-beam in the gorge below.

The summer was very hot and full of mist and of disease as summer on those shores is always ; the moorland grew full of dangerous gases, the broad oak foliage sicklied and looked parched ; the sea was grey and hazy with the horrible haze of heat ; pestilential vapours rose in steam from the marshes ; clouds hung on the windless air that were clouds, not of rain, but of mosquitoes ; all animal life grew feeble, languid and inert ; the time was come for the curse of Maremma, the midsummer that elsewhere is the year's crown of rejoicing.

In this oppressive weather, when the heavens looked a vault of copper, and the sea a breathless noxious oily plain, and all the marshes and the moors were as though a destroying wind of fire had passed over and

scorched them brown, Muşa, all by herself, still sought the shadow and the shelter of that tomb whose secret was only known to her.

She was never afraid ; she was always watching, watching for the dead to arise or to return. The intense silence did not appal her ; the intense solitude there, underneath the soil, all alone in that vault of sandstone, with the bones strewn on the beds of rock, had no terrors for her. These dead were like her people.

She was afraid lest any one should come to share their secret with her.

The moor was very lonely ; far off, now and then, the figure of a shepherd, satyr-like and clad in goatskin, would loom black against the orange of the sunset sky ; and she would watch him angrily and suspiciously lest he should bring his flocks to crop too near the mouth of the tombs, and learn their existence and rob her of their solitude. But no one disturbed her. The herds of buffaloes tramped by, snorting and bellowing as the gnats stung them, and the flies fastened in their flesh ; the wild boars would come too, seeking roots in the cracked dry ground, and thrusting their snouts amidst the saw-grass.

These were the only visitants that she had, except the frogs that croaked on the stagnant mud of the steaming pools, and all the feathered tribe of summer singers, that were mute under the burden of the windless weather, and sat dull and gasping in the caroba boughs.

One day at early morning, going there, she saw for the first time a human being amidst the maidenhair and the vetches about the orifice of the warrior's tomb. She saw him with displeasure and fear. Yet he was only a young goatherd about ten years of age, whose goats were all about him, cropping the herbage; grey, and black, and white, wise-looking, bright-eyed, creatures, half beast, half fawn, as all goats are, always looking as though they had strayed from Hymettus or from Tempe.

He was a pretty brown boy, a mountain and moorland boy, half-naked, and playing with his reed pipe, like a true son of Pan.

‘Who are you?’ she said angrily; for she felt that the moor was her own.

He laughed.

‘I am Zefferino; they call me Zirlo. I know you. You are the girl they call

Musoncella and the Velia down in Santa Tarsilla.'

'What if they do? Either is as good a name as Zirlo. Why do they call you Zirlo?'

'Because I sing!' ¹

'Who does not sing? That is nothing. Why do you bring your goats here?'

'Why not here? The moor and the marsh are free. It is hot, but there was no grass on the mountain so I came; I live in a hut on this moor in winter. I have not been down here since Pasquà.'

Musa was silent. She knew that it was true; the land was free.

'Do you live far off?' she asked.

'Up there,' he said; and pointed vaguely across the plain.

'What do they call it, where you live?'

'San Lionardo. It is over there.'

He pointed again across to where the red sullen haze of the heat overhung the inland moors, where they swelled upward and met the first spurs of the mountains.

Musa stood and looked; he was close by the aperture of the tombs, which she had carefully covered with stones and dead branches; he was lying on his back, with

¹ Zirlo means the whistling of the thrush.

his reed-pipe in his half-open hand; he had a lovely, dusky, innocent face.

‘Why do you mind my being here?’ he said, good-humouredly. ‘It is all so dry; my poor goats have had scarcely a mouthful all the week; just here it is a little better, because there is so much water. Why do you mind?’

‘I like to be alone.’

‘Ah, yes, you are the Musoncella. But it is not good to be alone. I never am, because I have the goats. I have heard say you are wicked. Are you wicked?’

‘I do not know.’

‘They say you strike people?’

‘Sometimes.’

Zirlo raised himself, a little in apprehension.

‘Why do you strike them?’

‘Only if they make me angry.’

‘You are angry now. I will take the goats away.’

Musa’s eyes shone; then she relented. He was afraid of her, so he disarmed her.

‘I do not want to hurt you. Let the goats feed,’ she said. She said it as a princess might have done, giving them leave to crop the roses of a palace garden.

Though she was like a young dryad, and he like a little faun, they were but children after all. The childhood in them had its affinity and its attraction.

It was early in the day ; a burning day in the most cruel month of the southern year, when even the red of the rosebud seems pale with heat, and even the gold of the sunflower wanes and rusts ; when the birds are silent everywhere, and the grass looks like the sand of a desert, and even the deep still hours of midnight are stifling and without air, and the cloudless heavens are as a furnace of brass.

There was a broad ilex-oak here, and the boy was in the shelter of its shade, and the goats too. Musa sat down beside them. She had some black bread and a flask of water ; he had the same. They ate and drank as two children might have done on the slopes of the Sicilian hills when Theocritus was shepherd there.

The boy was timid and yet attracted ; she was displeased, and yet did not wish to be unkind. The great heat was around them and above them, like a sea of hot vapour ; there seemed no hues anywhere that were not either grey or yellow ; it

looked as though dull sinking fires were burning on the horizon all around in a ring of flame; it was always so every morning and every evening while the sun was passing through the sign of Leo.

Musa sat and thought, How could she descend to her refuge without this lad learning the secret of it? As for him, he had taken his pipe, and was playing on it those melodious, carolling, tender little lays which had earned him his name from the people of the little mountain hamlet where he lived.

Musa, while she pondered, on her own thoughts intent, lifted her voice and sang; Zirlo sang too. The clear voices burst over the silence of the songless moor, and floated away over the silence of the buried tombs. Pan might have listened with joy had not Christ killed him.

When their voices were tired of leaping and falling, and piercing with sweet sound the drowsy heaviness of the atmosphere, they drank the water of their flasks and ate of their black crusts; the ilex leaves, black and grey against the yellow sunshine, drooping above their heads, unstirred by any breeze.

Suddenly the grazing goats stopped browsing and began to bleat uneasily, standing with their heads seawards.

‘There will be a storm,’ said Zefferino.
‘We cannot see it coming, but they can.’

‘If I were out at sea, I should know,’ said Musa. She was not so familiar with the portents of the land.

In less than ten minutes the storm broke, sudden, violent, terrible as only a rainless storm can be. The sky was a sheet of lightning; the wind rose in fury; the thunder pealed as if heaven and earth were meeting; clouds of dust were driven before the wind over the moor; and herds of buffaloes with their horns sloped downward, rushed, like a whirlwind themselves, over the ground towards the shelter of the thickets.

The goats massed together, with stern outward, resisted the force of the hurricane as best they could, trembling and staggering as the wind struck them like a scourge. Musa, who stood erect, though she was shaken like a young tree, seized the boy, who had fallen prone upon his face.

‘Get up; bring the beasts into shelter or they will perish!’ she cried to him as she

grasped him by his shirt of goatskin and plucked him from the ground.

‘Shelter! There is no shelter for leagues round!’ he screamed, and strove to cast himself again upon his face.

She dragged him up by sheer superior strength.

‘There is shelter,’ she said. ‘Follow me, and make the flock follow you.’

Deafened and blinded by the hurricane and the dust-storm, she managed to keep her feet, and reach the aperture that she had covered; she tore away the brambles and boughs till the stone steps were laid bare; then by force of will and force of limb together dragged the little shepherd down with her whilst she called his beasts. More sagacious than he, with a headlong rush the goats descended into the refuge, while the storm which for one instant had lulled broke out afresh with increased violence.

Musa, with the goats around her, stood in the warrior’s tomb. Zefferino was trembling and white with terror; he had fallen on his knees.

‘Oh, you coward!’ she cried, with boundless scorn; she, the daughter of Saturnino, had no fear in her.

Zirlo did not hear; he was so aghast at his own plight that he was scarcely sensible. Above head the tempest was pealing with awful fury; the echoes of the thunder pealed through the hollowed rocks; but the tomb was a safe shelter, the goats gathered themselves together against the bed of the vanished king, and were no more afraid: they bleated gently, that was all.

‘They say their prayers,’ said Musa. ‘Say yours if you are so timid.’

Zirlo began to murmur words that he had been taught to say at mass.

Musa stood and looked at him in the semi-darkness, with pity and contempt.

‘What would you do on the sea,’ she said, ‘when there is a storm? There are fifty every summer.’

‘I was not frightened when I was on my face,’ whispered Zefferino trembling. ‘But this place, this dark cold place—where am I? And your eyes blaze so; you frighten me more.’

‘Do my eyes blaze?’ said Musa, who was pleased to hear it. ‘If they do, it is because you are such a coward. Zirlo do they call you? A thrush would have more sense. This is mine, mine, do you

hear, this place, and you must never speak of it.'

Zirlo stared at her in the twilight.

'Yours?' he said, wonderingly.

'Mine, because I found it,' said Musa, and, added under her breath, 'Of course, it is theirs.'

'It is a cave,' said Zirlo, as his eyes wandered over the vault and the walls.

'It is a tomb,' said Musa.

The boy shuddered.

'You say that to frighten me. There is never a tomb made like this. A little hole in the earth, and a wooden box pushed in—that is what they call a tomb. I know, for they buried my mother last year.'

'You have no mother?'

'No.'

'I too have none.'

The common misfortune drew them together a little nearer; Zirlo's eyes filled with tears; Musa stood grave and absorbed; he knew all he lost; she could only imagine it. The storm still beat above ground; they could hear the breaking of boughs, the rushing of winds, the scampering hoofs of terrified animals running hither and thither.

‘If it would only rain,’ said the boy listening.

‘It will not rain,’ said Musa. ‘It will not rain for a month, perhaps not then ; the fishermen said so this morning.’

There is something awful and weird in a rainless storm, that seems unnatural, and is more deadly far to vegetation than the storms that drench and flood the land. When they are passed they leave a benison behind them, at least to all the sylva and the flora, in the freshened soil, the deepened streams, the brimming rivers. But a rainless storm is like a loveless life ; it brings and gains no blessing.

The children in the hollowed rock stood and listened to the sounds in the earth above. If it would only have rained, how welcome it would have been to hear the sweet cool fall of the big rain drops ! But it seldom rains in August even in moist Maremma, and besides ‘there is a red moon,’ said Zirlo, in the common superstition of all husbandry.

To the red moon the vine-dresser and the tiller of the fields ascribe one-half their ills. When the red pestilent dew is over leaf and soil no peasant will ever believe that it is not the moon that causes it.

It grew darker and darker, the roll of the thunder was continuous, the blaze of the lightning lit up now and again all the shadows of the Etruscan sepulchres.

‘I am afraid!’ cried Zirlo, and hid his face, as the electric glare shone on the banquet painted on the walls.

‘There is nothing that will hurt you,’ said Musa more gently, remembering the great awe that had fallen even upon her in this place.

‘But who are those?’ said Zirlo, trembling, pointing to the figures of the frescoes.

‘They are pictures of the dead; the dead of long ago,’ said Musa with a wistful sadness and reverence in her voice. ‘They used to reign here—here—and they must have been happy, I think; and they had flowers; see, there are the water-lilies like our lilies now, and the dog like my own white dog, and the pipe like that pipe you have cut from a reed. And yet it is all long, long ago, Joconda says; so long that the earth has had time to pile rocks and grow trees above their graves, and men have quite forgotten who they were.’

Zirlo was silent; this was a thing he could in no way grasp, and of time he had

no notion. If he had been asked how long he had lived, he would have said that he could not remember; he had been always on the moor, always with the goats; he knew what to do for them, and that was all he did know. His fathers before him had been shepherds, and he had been born in a hut made of reeds and bramble amidst the goats, and he had sucked them as the kids did, and grown up from a baby to a child amidst them, and then had had a goatskin garment girded about his loins, and a staff put in his small hand, and had been told to take the kids to pasture. That was all so long, long ago to him; he did not think these dead people that she spoke of could be so far away as that.

Nothing is so impossible for the uneducated mind to grasp as the idea of time. Musa only understood it with her imagination; her fancy enabled her to conjecture what her knowledge left a blank. But Zirlo had not this fatal gift; his mind had never got beyond the marsh and moor, the flock and fold. The bare bold scarp that was called San Lionardo was the outmost boundary of his world. As he thought that the ivy and the honeysuckle only grew for

his goats, so he thought that the sun and the rain were only made for them.

It is this narrowness of the peasant mind which philosophers never fairly understand, and demagogues understand but too well, and warp to their own selfish purpose and profits.

When the hurricane had lulled and they could leave their refuge, Musa bade him good day, and took her own way to the Sasso Scritto, three miles off; the storm had quite passed, but it had only left the earth more arid and more desolate. Broken branches strewed the ground, and the earth had yawned open in many places as if by an earthquake; the lizards swarmed, making the dry grass crack and rustle as they kissed or fought; here and there out of a hole a snake thrust his black or leaden-coloured head. The intense heat lay like a fog on all the country; a heat breathless, scorching, cruel, in which all hues were blanched and all animal movement seemed suspended.

It was near the close of day; the sun almost touched the horizon; it was dully red, and rayless.

When she reached the edge of the waves

the red globe seemed to rest upon the water ; a cone of luminous white light replaced it in the heavens ; and on each side of it there glowed another crimson sun.

It was but the optical effect well known to astronomers, due to the refraction and reflection of light. But it terrified philosophers and astrologists and conquerors in days of old, and startled her now.

The long curved shores, the sea still as 'a painted ocean,' the grey skies with their pallid mists, the black heaps of putrefying weed upon the beach, the fierce sickly heat that had a pressure on the brain like the heavy hand of an invisible god—these were all too familiar to her to seem strange, but the white iridescent intense light of this atmospheric phænomenon she had never seen, for in these latitudes it is rare.

She stood still and looked at it as Antoninus, and Pliny, and Constantine had looked before her in the same wonder ; herself, black as a figure on a camera against the yellow haze of sea and sky.

As she gazed in some vague awe, beholding the sun thus multiplied, she saw the head of a man in the sea. He seemed not to swim, but to be at the pleasure of the

water swell which floated him where it would. He never moved, or struggled, or seemed to exert himself at all. Musa looking intensely, used to all the ways of the water and those who trusted themselves to it, saw that the swimmer could not make any way, that he was cramped and paralysed. A mere black-looking log, he lay on the glassy surface with the vertical transparent gleam of the luminous column behind him. Then, as she looked, slowly, quite slowly, he sank.

He was drowning, peacefully, unresistingly, as the sun seemed itself to sink into the sea, tranquilly and of its own will.

Musa wasted not one moment, nor thought again of the apparition on the heavens, but waded in, and struck out towards him.

The water was still warm from the heat of the day; it felt oily and unwholesome; the storm had left a heavy turbulent movement in it that was like a tide and was hard to breast. But she had lived in the sea for hours most days of her life, and was a strong swimmer, capable of long exertion. The body rose up, and once again sank, as she neared it; she knew it would rise yet again; if only she could be certain where it would

rise it would be possible she thought to herself to save him yet. She made her way steadily and swiftly, cleaving the Mediterranean with her brown supple arms and keeping her head and throat well above water. It would have been better if she had had the boat, she knew ; but it was ten yards off her, moored under the Sasso Scritto, and it would have wasted many minutes to unloose and launch it.

She rested on the waves a moment and watched for the man, who might be drowned and dead by now, to appear again ; it was very dark upon the sea ; the brief light of the parhelion had faded ; the sun and its phantoms had alike gone from sight ; there was only a dull red spent colour far away in the west, and the moon had not yet risen.

At last something came in sight ; it would have been hard to tell what it might be in the dusk, and with the sea churned to white foam from the storm as it was.

But she swam to and seized it ; she felt the round shape of a human head in her hand, and, being close to it, she saw the dusky bulk of a human body. The skull was close shaven, and there was nothing on the

body to hold by except a trouser-belt about the loins, which she could dimly see as the foam broke over it and the motion of the water rocked it. She grasped the belt with one hand, and, swimming with the other, turned now flat upon her breast instead of on her back, she towed the body behind her towards the land, as she might have towed a piece of driftwood.

She thought he was dead, but having thus reached him she could not abandon him ; and there might be breath in him still. She had seen drowned men restored to life.

Happily for her and him, she was but a little way from shore, or she could not have continued to push and drag the inert mass that lay so heavily upon the water. The sea upon that portion of the beach was shallow ; she soon stood upon her feet and waded up to her middle, always dragging the senseless swimmer with her till she gained the pebbles and the sand, and let him drop on them.

It was now very dark.

She bent over him and breathed into his nostrils, and tried to make him vomit the water from his lungs, and did what she had seen the fishermen of Santa Tarsilla do for any one of their number overcome with such

exhaustion. The fishermen's were rude ways, not founded on any scientific reasons, but often tried in actual experience; they sometimes succeeded and they succeeded now; the heart of the man began to beat feebly, the sea water poured from his mouth, a shiver ran through all his frame; he awoke to life. He was a large, sinewy, supple-limbed man; he wore canvas drawers and a belt of leather; he was burnt almost black by the sun from the forehead to the waist. He was about fifty years old, or more. He raised himself into a sitting posture on the sands, and stared into the dusk with wild, fierce, suspicious eyes, not knowing where he was, not seeing the girl in the deep shadows, not understanding what had come to him.

'Do not give me up,' he muttered; and his hands felt at his ankles and his wrists, as if seeking something familiar that was not there. He lifted his head and glared around, trying to pierce the gloom. He was confused and stupefied, but his eyes had ferocity and fear like those of a captured wild beast.

'If I had only a knife!' he muttered. 'If I had only a knife!'

Musa listened and was sorry for him.

He was afraid, this strong, rough, savage creature; afraid of something—perhaps of capture. She did not think that he might be dangerous to her. She touched him on the shoulder.

‘Why do you want a knife? And what is it you dread?’

He looked at her and realised in a dim way that it was only a girl, a child, whose figure loomed dark between him and the grey sea sand.

‘How came I here?’ he asked her, confused still. There was scarce any light; but the little there was, reflected from the skies, showed her a face so sullen in its despair, so brutal in its ferocity that, bold child though she was, she trembled as she saw.

‘You were drowning,’ she said simply. ‘I saved you. That was all.’

‘You saved me!’

He looked at her and laughed with a hard, grinding, joyless laugh that grated on her ears.

‘*You?*’ he echoed, ‘you are a baby. It is a lie. There are men hidden——’

‘There is no one. I am strong. I swam and saved you. I was foolish to do it.’

He was still sitting on the sand, his

soaked canvas clinging to him, his breast and back bare and looking like the torso of a bronze Hercules; his head was shaved close, his shoulder had a brand.

Musa felt the bright brave blood in her veins run cold. She had heard of galley-slaves; she knew now that she was facing one, alone on the lonely shore.

‘I understand,’ she said very low. ‘You have escaped——?’

He moved his head in assent.

‘You will not betray me?’ he said quickly. ‘If you do, though I have no knife, I will kill you. You are young. One could crush you to death.’

‘You could,’ said the child, and stood looking down on him, wondering why she had seen him this hot, silent night—why she had saved him.

Another of her age would have fled in terror; Musa did not leave him. His very ferocity and wretchedness rooted her there and kept her wondering, and forgetful, or indifferent, of personal pity.

‘How did you escape? By swimming?’ she asked breathlessly; the longing for the bold, strange tale that he must have to tell overcame every other feeling in her.

‘Are you alone?’ he said, disregarding.
‘If you lie I will tear you with my teeth,
and kill you, so.’

‘Why should I lie?’

‘To hunt me down.’

‘I would not help them to hunt you;
not more than I would to hunt the boar.’

He stared at her with brooding, blood-shot eyes that glowed in the gloom like a jackal’s.

‘Was I drowning, do you say?’

‘Yes, you were drowning: who are you?’

He ground his teeth that flashed white
like an angry dog’s.

‘Who? Who? I am nothing. I have
no name; I am numbered like a beast of
burden. I am dead and buried. But if I
had a knife!—if I had a knife!——’

‘What would you do?’

‘I should be a man once more. To have
a knife and a gun, that is to be a man.’

His head sank on his chest; he was stupid,
and his mind began to wander a little; he
had been in the water for hours; he was
numb and felt strange. He stared at her
with reddened eyes that were black and
sombre save for the flame that could light
up in them.

‘You are a strange wench. Perhaps you mean well. If you did save me——’

‘I did save you.’

‘You are strong and bold then. Yes, I swam. I have lain hid on the rocks at night and crept along the coast by day; we had sighted a boat; we sculled along in her, but in the storm just now she heeled over; we swam for our lives; he who was with me is drowned I think. Just now I grew blind and numb, and I could not make way any more. I suppose it was being so long in the sea. I am thirsty. Give me to drink.’

She had had the half emptied gourd slung at her side, and had set it down on the beach when she plunged into the water. She held it to him, and he drank it dry.

‘Were it but wine!’ he said, with an oath. ‘Give me a knife now.’

‘I have no knife.’

‘You can get one.’

‘Not here. This is all wild coast.’

He sat up and stared still sullenly into the gloom; he was bewildered, but he remained suspicious and ferocious like the tiger chased by night and dazzled by torches and fire.

‘I was Saturnino,’ he said, low in his teeth.

She understood. She had heard of Saturnino.

‘If I had only a knife!’ he repeated; ‘only a knife or a gun!’——

His bronze-like shoulders glistened with the salt of the sea; he sat erect on the beach regaining strength and consciousness with each breath; the heat of the night was around them like steam: it seemed to her startled fancy as if his eyes and his mouth gave out fire. She was rooted to the ground as by some spell; a fascination that she was powerless to resist held her there, by this man, though she knew he could turn and rend her as the wild boar tore the young dogs.

‘Tell me how you got away,’ she said very low at last, spurred on to rashness by an unquenchable longing to hear and know. ‘Tell me, tell me; I will tell no one else; never, never, will I tell.’

The hunted creature that had once been the superb chieftain of the hills did not heed. He was looking northward down the long, low, level shore that shone ashen and white in the strong moonlight.

‘Is there no place to hide in?’ he muttered; ‘is there not a rock, not a stone? Is it all bare—bare and accursed. They will come hunting at daybreak.’

‘Do they know you are away?’

‘Know? Every day I baulk them and beat them. I lie hid, and I hear their feet on the stones above me. I see the shine of their steel through the gaps. Where can I hide? You are of the coast?’

‘Yes.’

‘Where can I hide? Hide me. If you betray me I will kill you—somehow.’

Musa did not answer. She was thinking.

‘I know of one place,’ she said slowly.

‘On the shore?’

‘No. Inland; a little way.’

He rose with difficulty; a tall, gaunt, terrible form, black and weird against the shining sea and the starry skies.

‘Lead me there. Remember, I need no knife to kill you. You are young, and to me are little.’

‘I am not afraid that you should kill me.’

She spoke the truth; she was not afraid. An immense pity, and what was that stronger sister of pity—sympathy—was in her for the hunted, houseless man, and the strength of

that emotion absorbed into itself all weaker, slighter feelings, and made selfish dread impossible.

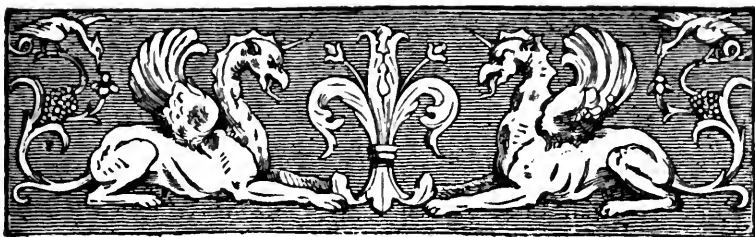
She was awed, but she was not afraid. She wished to help him as she had wished to help the driven boar at bay.

Her lustrous, unfathomable, star-like eyes looked up into his wild and sombre ones; they did not know one another, but each trusted the other after that one long look.

‘Come,’ she said simply, and struck inland.

The light was clear almost as the day; the pale, sad shores looked wan; the brown and shadowy moors had a mysterious, unearthly calm; the heat brooded on sea and earth like a cloud of pestilence slowly gathering its forces to destroy. From far off down the shore in the intense stillness there came a sound. It was the sound of the horses’ feet of the carabineers: they were seeking the galley-slave.

He listened with pricked ears, and crouched, like the hunted fox; then he followed the child, their two shadows falling one on another in sable blackness on the pallor of the sand. Musa led him to the tomb of the Lucumo.



CHAPTER IX.

HE followed her mutely, and asked her nothing. He did not doubt her. He did not question her.

The sound of the horses' hoofs in pursuit had gone from off the stillness of the night. His quick and apprehensive glance told him of the excellence against discovery of the tangled scrub and thorny brake through which she led him. When they descended into the tomb he asked nothing still ; to others it might be a tomb—to him it was only a hollow in the ground as is his earth to the fox.

‘It is good,’ he said, as he looked around him in the chamber of stone.

She drew the lamp forth and lighted it. His glance glistened ; he saw gold,

‘What place is this?’ he muttered, the sight of the gold stinging his senses to life.

‘It is a grave,’ said Musa, in a hushed and tender voice. ‘And these are sacred things. Sacred to the dead, and to the gods.’

He laughed; his laugh was hard and low, and hurt her.

‘The place is good,’ he said once more. ‘Is there food in it?’

‘There is no food. But I will bring you some at morning; some bread at least.’

‘And a knife. Bring me a knife.’

She hesitated.

‘I will bring you bread and wine.’

‘Bring me a knife.’

‘But you will kill some one?’

‘What of that? I will not kill you if you keep faith.’

‘I did not mean that. I am not afraid.’

‘Bring me a knife, if you are not afraid.’

‘I am not.’

‘Who knows of this place?’

‘Not any one; only I know, and a little goatherd.’

‘That is well. Go get me the bread; I am sick with hunger.’

‘I cannot; it is miles off that I live, but at daybreak I will be here.’

A gleam of sullen, suspicious wonder flared like a dull flame in his eyes.

‘Why should you do this? You cannot care.’

‘You are hunted,’ she answered simply.

That was the truth ; he was hunted, and so she aided him.

‘You can sleep there,’ she said to him, and pointed to the couch of stone on which the golden warrior had rested. ‘I am sorry that I have no food. I will try and be quick. But I am tired, and it is far.’

His eyes gazed at her sullenly, wonderingly, yet with a gleam of gratitude, like the gleam in the eyes of a fierce dog which, after being lashed and chained through years, is loosened by a tender hand, and wonders, distrusts, and yet is thankful.

‘If you do come back you will be brave as men are rarely,’ he said, with a gloom deep as night upon his darkening face.

‘I will come,’ she said simply ; then she looked up once in his face, put the lamp down on the stone, and went.

‘Perhaps I should have killed her,’ thought Saturnino. ‘It would have been safer, and it would have been easy—that small throat.’

His fingers closed instinctively as though they were closing upon the slender neck.

But Musa was away, running fleet through the pallid moonlight.

When she reached the edge of the sea there was no sound ; her boat was rocking on the surf ; the moon had climbed into the zenith ; far away upon the white expanse of the sands she saw four dark specks no bigger than four stalks of grass ; they were the carabineers riding on southward towards Santa Tarsilla.

‘They are fools!’ said the child with scorn. Had she been in pursuit of any creature, she would have noticed the signs on the sands disturbed where she had dragged the swimmer ashore ; she would not have ridden by unheeding as they did, and passed on, as they were doing, to Santa Tarsilla unsuspecting.

‘They are fools!’ she said to herself with that pleasure in the defeat of authority and that contempt for its narrow means and narrow sight which had been born in her with her blood. Then she loosened her boat and rowed backward to the little town.

The carabineers were always in sight—

little dark specks in the white space of the sandy shore.

She was very tired. Strong and young though she was, she was exhausted by the efforts she had made and by the long hours in which all her muscles had been strained to unusual effort. The heat was still intense, for in midsummer in this country the heat in darkness is often more oppressive than in the hours when the sun is shining. At midnight and for a little after midnight, it will at times be chill, but before midnight it is sultry still. The heat, the sullen, heavy air, the singular drowsiness which comes with the moon's rays after these burning days, united with the fatigue that she had borne, made her eyes grow weary and slumber steal upon her ere she was aware. The oars lay motionless in the rowlocks, her head dropped, her arms relaxed their tension, and she fell asleep.

The sea was calm as glass; her boat floated on it with hardly any movement; the great white flood of moonlight fell upon it and her; together they made but a small, dark, motionless thing in the midst of that silvery field of light. How long she slept she never knew; when she awoke with a

start the cool of the midnight had come that comes with the descent of the dews.

Used to the look of the sky, she knew that it was midnight by the stars. She awoke refreshed, but conscience-stricken. Every moment she delayed was a pang of hunger and of fear more to the hunted man. She owed him no service, but she pitied him; she had promised him; these were bonds that knit her to him strongly, and that it never occurred to her to break.

But how to get him food and wine and the weapon that he had prayed for?—the weapon that she could understand would be sweeter to him than any drink to his thirst, any bread to his famine? She did not know how to find them. The houses of Santa Tarsilla would be all shut and the people all slumbering by the time she reached there, and money she had none, even had there been any place upon the coast nearer than the fishing-town that was her home. There was nothing for it but to ask Joconda.

She bent her back to the oars once more and rowed on steadily; the carabineers had passed out of sight long before: whilst she had been asleep they had ridden down into Santa Tarsilla and had revived long dormant

memories with the old forgotten cry of Saturnino.

She rowed on, and in somewhat less than two hours she saw the low, grey line of the stone piers of the little harbour, and the masts of the few old useless boats that were left at home, and the round white towers of the soldiery and coastguard. All was quite quiet.

She steered herself carefully within the shallow water, and fastened the boat to the ring. Where the moonlight is so brilliant the shadows are proportionately black. She could keep out of sight in these shadows, and did so, for she heard voices and a sort of stir in the narrow lanes that parted the houses one from another. Some people were awake loitering languidly on the stones, or hanging from the open windows. The passage of the mounted carabineers through the town had roused them, but only roused them slightly. To men and women shaking with ague, feeble with fever, ill always through brain and bone with the deadly air, it mattered very little whether the law had its rights or not.

For the most part they would have hindered the law rather than have helped

it, but even to hinder it they would have had but scant energy.

She went by under the shade cast by the projecting roofs unseen by any of them. She gathered from their talk that the carabinieri had searched through the place, then ridden on; men were saying to one another that they remembered Saturnino Mastarna, remembered the day the guards had brought him down from the hills with his feet tied under his horse's belly for the market crowd to gaze at in dull Grosseto.

'He was a brave man,' they said with a reverence in their voices that they never gave to the guardians of the law.

'He was brave,' thought Musa as she heard. 'Then it must be right to save him.'

She went to her own home.

All was locked and barred; but she pushed herself through the stable windows by withdrawing the wooden shutter on the outside.

Leone did not give tongue; he came to her in silence, only moving his tail with welcome. Joconda lay in a sound slumber, so sound that she might have been murdered in her sleep without awaking. A gleam from the moon came in and fell on

her hard, toilworn, withered face, and her knotted hands and her rough white hair, and the sheaf of bleached palm blessed at Easter that hung above her bed to keep away evil spirits and to please the saints.

Musa looked at her with a great tenderness gleaming in her own eyes.

‘I am going to rob her,’ she thought wistfully. ‘But I will tell her in the morning, and if she be angry then I will sell my gold Madonnina and pay her. That will be just.’

Without arousing the sleeper she took a brown loaf, a flask of wine, and a knife.

Then she soothed Leone with a caress, and went as she had come, softly and unseen, drawing the stable shutter behind her carefully when she had gone forth again into the air. She was now very tired. But her spirit was strong and her will resolute. She never thought of not returning to the tomb. Not to keep faith with that friendless creature would have seemed to her most vile. She could not have told why, but when he had every man’s hand against him it would have seemed to her vile and mean to desert him or betray him. To spare herself did not occur to her. She would go on, she said to herself; go on till she dropped down, per-

haps, as the women did sometimes from sunstroke when they were raking in the salt.

It was now day dawn ; the pale gleam of morning was beginning to show over the dusk of the marshes and mountains far away inland. Another long, dreary, scorching, cloudless day was about to be born on Maremma.

She stepped once more into the boat, and once more retraced her path across the waters.

The gossipers had all gone within to sleep a little ; a few early-risen toilers, too aged or ill to be away with the coral fleet, were getting out tackle and nets to go and try for fish close in to shore, or going with their sickles to cut the maritime rush that grew in long lines here and there between the beach and marsh.

No one noticed her, because they were so used to see her out at daybreak by, or on, the sea.

She got away safely, and rowed on along the coast. She was so fatigued that she could barely grasp the oars and move them, and she made slow headway against the inert water. There were fish rising all around her ; before going deep down in the heat of

the noon they passed the early morning on the surface, catching insects and infusoria. The sun was not yet up, and it was cool ; yet all the landscape was pale, grey, and weary-looking as if the night had brought little repose and little freshness.

It was a toilsome journey ; it seemed to her to be endless. Midway in it the sun rose, and the touch of its rays on her bare arms felt like fire. In the great heats even sunrise loses its charm, and seems but a trouble the more to the tired eyes that wake from startled sleep and wasting sweats.

With pain and effort she dragged herself ashore at last, three hours after she had left the pier of Santa Tarsilla, and began her toilsome walk through the close-growing timber and thorny thickets up to the tomb. Her head swam, her sight began to fail, her limbs felt heavy as lead ; but the thought of the faith that she kept, of the succour she went to give, sustained her.

‘He will not doubt now,’ she thought.
‘He will be glad.’

She had brought away with her, as well as the knife, three silver coins that had been given her once by a traveller whom she had guided across the marshes ; they

were all she had ; she meant to give them to Saturnino.

She pushed her way through the cistus, and bearberry, and rosemary ; now and then a partridge flew up before her feet, but there were no birds singing ; the season of song was passed. There were hundreds of lizards rushing to and fro, and the big wood rat, the fox, and the snipe, and the plover, were still astir, going home after their night's foray ; that was all.

She pushed the bushes aside and ran down the steps, and entered the cave without fear, thinking only of the help that she brought. The tomb was empty.

In answer to her shouts there was only a dull echo thrown back from the roof of sandstone.

Suspicion and distrust, the seeds sown by captivity, and sure to bring forth fruit in sullen sins of hatred and of fear, had been too strong for the nature of the galley-slave to resist their influence and their instinct. How could he tell that she would not sell her secret for a price, and only return to bring his capturers with her ? How could he tell ?

Alone there in the bowels of the earth,

cowardice and mistrust had mastered him. He had left his shelter and fled.

Looking round, she saw that the golden lamp, and the golden diadem, and all the toys of gold, were gone.

Saturnino, so long the robber of the living, had now robbed the dead.





CHAPTER X.

WHEN late in the hot day Musa returned to Santa Tarsilla, after long dreamless sleep of intense fatigue which had lasted many hours, she was very pale, and her face had a look of sullen pain. For the first time in her young life she had been deceived. Where he had gone in those wild swamps and barren moors she knew not, but he had deceived her—that was enough to know.

He had robbed the dead and their gods. He became abhorrent to her.

Of the thanklessness to herself she thought little, but of that theft of the sacred things she had no forgiveness. She had never felt even tempted to take them; they had been hallowed to her; they had been

the armour, the arms, the jewels, the possessions of the golden king whom the first ray of light had set free to ascend to the stars. She would sooner have stolen the chalice off the church altar, the jewels off the saint's shrine, than have touched those treasures of the Etruscan dead.

The flight and the theft of the man she had saved, weighed on her with a sense of shame; a burning indignation consumed her. She was silent by nature; she crushed the pain in silence into her heart, and said to herself that she would never speak of that traitor—never tell any living being of her rescue of him and of her betrayal by him—never; not even Joconda.

She came home to the stone pier of Santa Tarsilla and fastened up the boat in silence, and took her way through the little town, steeped in the drowsy calm of a sultry and late afternoon.

Here and there in an open court, or upon a stone bench, or under the deep eaves of a roof some figure was lying asleep; that was all. The stillness of heat and of exhaustion had fallen on all the place, and the very dogs lay motionless and stupid in what little shade there was to be found anywhere.

Where was he, the hunted man, in this intolerable glare of day?

She thought of him fleeing always over the brown burnt moors, the pallid wastes of sand, with the stolen gold that he would be able neither to eat nor drink, and would not dare to barter. Let the guards have him if they would, she thought; he was vile.

Nothing is so cruel as youth in its scorn; she was full of scorn, and cruel. She would have seen the guards take him now, and would not have lifted her hand or opened her lips. He was a traitor and a thief.

Yet it hurt her to remember what he had done. The betrayal weighed upon her with a heavy hand. She had given him sanctuary, and he had robbed her.

A girl she knew, Fulvia, daughter of Gianno, was sitting on an open door sunning her rich gold tresses in the old Venetian way.

‘Where have you been?’ the girl called to her. ‘There was a stir last night. Some carabineers came hunting for a man that had got away off Gorgona. They said he was Saturnino. Saturnino used to rule all the mountains over there, so my father says; have you heard tell of it?’

‘I have been away on the sea,’ said Musa, and passed on ; the girl called after her.

‘He is loose on the country, so they say, he has got away somewhere ; I thought you might know. But you have never a word for any one, you graceless, sullen thing.’

Musa passed on along the line of sun-baked stone-faced houses with their middens stinking in front of them, and beyond the middens the rotten seaweeds, the salt and clammy beach.

She reached her home in a few moments ; the house was closed as it had been at midnight, and was quite as still. She was not frightened at that, since often Joconda went far afield with the old mule, and shut her dwelling closely in her absence. Perhaps Joconda had gone to seek for her, herself, alarmed at her being away so long upon the water ;—so she thought.

She tried the house door ; the dog was howling low within. She could not stir the door, which fastened inside with ancient iron bolts and locks. She unslipped the stable shutter as before, and by the stable entered the house as in the night. The

mule was in his place, munching straw and the withered leaves of cane.

She went thence into the room of Joconda ; Leone did not cease to howl, although he saw her.

Joconda still lay sleeping.

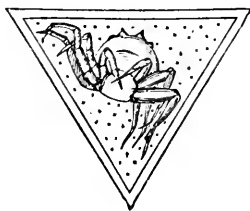
‘She must be ill,’ thought Musa, with a sudden pang, and the chillness of a new vague terror falling on her.

She sprang to the bedside where the dog lay moaning. Joconda had not moved since the night ; only on her face there was shining, instead of the silvery moonlight, the yellowish, sickly glare of the setting sun.

She had died in her sleep.

A terrible cry rang through the empty house out to the seashore.

Musa was left alone.





CHAPTER XI.

WHILST in the midnight hours the carabinciers had searched Santa Tarsilla, and the people had spoken of Saturnino and recalled the old days of his prowess and fame, this long, toil-worn, rough, enduring life had come to an end; decently, silently, without complaint and without companionship, as it had been spent.

When the neighbours, apathetic but not brutal, though, being a foreign woman, they had let her live alone, came running in at the sound of that terrible and desolate cry, they found Musa lying senseless by the white dog, and the blanched blest palm hanging above a body already cold in the stiffness of death.

Joconda must have died somewhere about midnight, so the apothecary told them when he came. He said that death had come from sheer old age ; the life had ceased, that was all, as an old tree falls, as an old clock refuses to move and grows dumb. There was nothing strange in it. She had been eighty-five years old if one. No one had noticed her house being closed all day, because it was so often shut up in that way when she was absent.

When Musa regained consciousness she saw the brown, withered, labour-bent body lying still upon the mattress, as an old broken bough will lie on the cold ground.

‘I robbed her last night!’ she said suddenly, with a piteous self-reproach. Her great eyes had a grievous despair and shame in them.

Happily for her, in the clamour of tongues around her no one heard or heeded. No one thought of her, or troubled about her. Joconda must be buried before another day broke, that was what they thought of, and talked of who would have the little she had saved, and the mule. It was a strong beast and useful, although old ; they began to ask each other what they would give for it, and

to wonder who had the right to see to the burial and pay for the mass. She was known to have had a little money hidden somewhere, but perhaps she had people that belonged to her over the mountains in far Savoy.

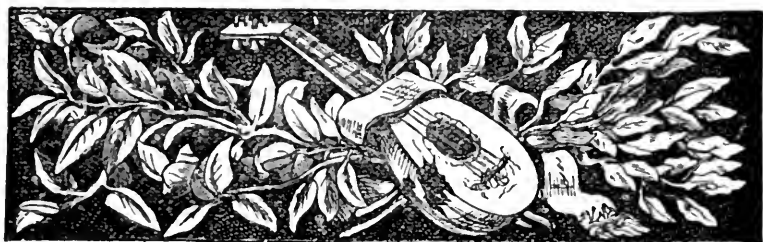
None of them thought of Musa, who, after that first bitter cry of self-reproach had burst from her, had sat mute and still beside the dead, with the white dog between her knees.

When they fetched the priest from vespers, and he spoke to her, she stared ; his words went by her without awaking in her any sense of them ; she was dumb as the dog was ; her sorrow had neither tears nor speech, yet it was very great.

Between Joconda and herself there had been seldom tenderness, but there had been always love. An immense void had suddenly yawned in her path ; an immense loss, that she could ill measure, had fallen on her. She had not been very happy, for life at Santa Tarsilla does not contain many of the elements of happiness ; she had always vaguely suffered from the narrowness and stupor of it, from the languor and disease that were around her, and her whole nature

and intelligence had always needed a richer soil, a finer air. But Joconda had been good to her always. She had been all that the girl had known of motherlike care and watchfulness ; she had been always just, and, in her own rough way, indulgent. What she knew of the wild, fierce strain that was in Musa's veins had made her very patient of her wanderings on sea and land, and of her sudden passions. Joconda had always said to herself, 'it is the blood of the Mastarna,' and so had made excuse.

It had been a part of her life to see Joconda always near her ; she had never had to take thought for herself ; the bread and the broth were always on the board ; her linen in summer, her lamb's-wool clothes in winter, were always ready ; as she had dropped asleep she had always heard the voice of Joconda muttering her aves in that faith in some answer coming sometime, from somewhere, which had never left her ; though an answer she never had got, unless this death which had come to her all unawares in the stillness of the night could be called one.



CHAPTER XII.

THEY buried her at midnight with the horrible, selfish haste of the country's habits and laws in death.

The day before she had been alive ; a woman, shrewd, brave, wise, and faithful in her own rude way, boiling the soup in her pot, cutting the canes for her mule, looking at the sea and the sun, giving good-day to her neighbours from her house-door ; and now she was thrown into a hole of the earth, and the earth was cast in upon her, and she was nothing—nothing ;—less than the fish that died in the nets on the shore, for they could be sold, and so were of value.

To the living, human beings are cruel very often ; but to the dead they are always brutal, be the dead, pauper or king.

Only one torch burned for her ; old Andreino, the fisherman, bore it. It burnt steadily in the hot, heavy night. Musa and the white dog stood by the grave. She moved as if she were walking in her sleep, and never a sound came from her lips ; the dog hung his head, but was quiet, pressing close to her side. Once he threw his muzzle in the air and howled. It was when the first shovelful of sand and clay fell on the dead body.

The priest spoke some commonplace words of consolation and of hope ; he was a simple, honest man, the son of seafaring people, and born fifty years earlier in Santa Tarsilla. Musa did not hear what he spoke.

She went home in unbroken silence ; the night was oppressive, the sea was still, the heavens were covered with mist. There was one more grave on the low sandy shore ; that was all.

She went home to the house, and barred herself in, and threw herself on the bed where Joconda had died. No one had the heart to disturb her that night.

‘ Let her sleep if she can,’ said the priest and old Andreino. But for them the women

would have dragged her out, and made her understand that she was homeless.

All the day following she kept her door, and her shutters, barred, and would see no living creature. Towards evening the priest of the parish came ; a little bibulous and garrulous, not clever nor wise, but simple of spirit, and honest and cheerful.

She would not open to him until he said that he brought her a message from the dead. Then she let him enter, shutting the door again on the peering faces of Andreino and some women gathered out there in the hot air.

The priest spoke kindly to her, a little frightened at her looks ; she was quite silent, and her eyes were dry though their lids were swollen and very weary.

He told her that the dead woman had left with him the knowledge of the precise spot where her little treasure was hidden, and he counted the stones of the paved floor from right to left, and found the one beneath which was the pitcher containing the coins, and he raised it up, and took the pitcher out, and read to her the words of bequest leaving to her the money, the furniture, the hardware, the mule, all in a

word that Joconda had possessed, written by the scribe of Grosseto on the bit of yellow paper folded across the jug.

Musa listened and saw ; she said nothing ; she did not even notice that on that paper she had herself no name save the baptismal one from the Egyptian saint. She only thought all the while :

‘She was all I had on earth and she is gone.’

The priest tried to speak a few phrases in season of counsel, to hazard a few questions, but he made no way. Musa was still and mute ; she seemed to him like a statue ; she said only as she looked at the pitcher—

‘This is mine ?’

‘Surely,’ said the priest. ‘At least there are none that I know of nearer of kin to dispute, and even if there were, the bequest, I think, would hold good. I am not sure, but so I believe.’

Musa lifted the pavement and replaced the pitcher with its coins in its hole. Then, with a sound that was half sob, half sigh, she sat down on the edge of the low bed and said to the good man :

‘Father, will you go ? I am best alone.’

‘But you cannot remain alone—you, a girl so young——’

She did not answer. There was something in her look and in her attitude that awed him: he was used to the vehement outbursts and the evanescent passions of a passionate but quickly consoled people; he did not understand her; he thought hastily that in the morning he must take counsel with the sisters up at the convent, and muttered his blessing feebly and went away. She barred the door behind him.

The good man went home and ate his little supper of small fish and oil, and drank a sweet pale wine, and gossiped with his *capellano*, telling him that the woman of Savoy had after all died worth a pretty penny; a whole jug full of gold pieces under the stones and left to the girl. Who was the girl? What would she do?

The *capellano* in turn went out and gossiped with the few dwellers in Santa Tarsilla, all loitering or lying about by the edge of the sea this hot night, gasping for a breath of air, and, in default of the air, grateful to hear some news.

They grumbled much one to another;

for they were dissatisfied, and their curiosity had no food for its appetites.

‘One would have thought to know who that wench is now,’ they grumbled to one another, and some of the women said :

‘She has got no name. That is odd. Do you mind of the time when Saturnino was taken up in the hills yonder? Some did think then the girl was Saturnino’s daughter. But Joconda was always so close.’

Musa herself did not notice that she had no name in that little wrinkled bit of paper which gave her the money and the mule.

Alone she passed the long oppressive sultry hours.

She heard the voices of the people outside as the sun dropped and the night came ; but she would not open, even to old Andreino, who rapped at the door with a stick and called to her more than once. She lay awake all the night long ; towards dawn she fell into what was rather stupor than sleep. In her sleep she was always trying to loosen the weight of the sand and the earth that lay on the body of her lost friend, and to lift up Joconda from that close and cruel prison. She thought she could have better borne her loss if the dead body had

been laid gently down upon those rocky biers in the Etruscan tomb, there to wait till the moonlight should touch her and take her to itself, as it had touched and taken the Etruscan king. But how could she ever rise from that narrow bed, from that stifling sand, from that ghastly crowded place where the dead lay like mounds of putrid fish, thrown down and forsaken ?

It was late in the day when the child awoke from this heavy troubled sleep, which left her dazed and fatigued, as she had been at night ; awoke with the burning sun on her aching eyes, to hear impatient hands knocking at the shutters and the house door :

‘ Art thou dead, too ? ’ the shrill voices of women were calling.

Musa shuddered, and in the scorching heat of the morning felt cold.

Was Joconda in truth lost for ever ? Had this death which had been so long in the mist of a vague dread and foreboding become a fact ? Would she never come back ?

The neighbours knocked louder and louder. She rose, clothed herself and opened to them.

‘ What do you want ? ’ she asked of them.

They burst into the room; the five or six women who were all that Santa Tarsilla held in summer-time, a little sickly child or two between them; old Andreino was a little way behind.

‘My dear one,’ he said, with a hand to his eyes, ‘if any love can be of use to you, I and my Serafina too——’

‘You can have nothing ready in the house. Come and break your fast with us, Musa mine,’ said the foremost woman, ruthlessly drowning the rest of his phrases with her own shrill tones, to be in turn swamped in a neighbour’s fuller voice that cried :

‘Not a wink of sleep have I had this night, thinking of the good soul gone to her rest; neither have you closed your eyes, my dear; that one sees without asking. I have brought a fresh egg——’

‘Addle your eggs!’ cried a third, elbowing her away with scorn; though, indeed, eggs were rare as roses on the sad seashore. ‘Let the girl come and take bit and sup with one who can be as a mother to her. How should she dwell alone and fare and cook for herself? My man has just brought in some fine fresh crayfish——’

‘Get out,’ said old Andreino fiercely; ‘who should she come to if not to her oldest friends? My Serafina is in bed with the ague, or she would have been here all night. My house is Musa’s, and that I promised long ago to the good dead soul sitting out by the threshold there. I said to Joconda—I said——’

He continued to talk for ten full minutes, but no one heard a syllable more that he said, by reason of the superior strength of screaming that the women’s lungs possessed.

Amidst the hubbub and outcries she stood quite still; she scarcely seemed even to see that the people were there.

When they found her silence continue so long, and that neither by look nor word was she moved to respond to their hospitable and fond entreaties, they began to grow angry; and one of them said tartly and hotly:

‘We come in charity and good will, but we may go in wrath. Musa, there is money here, and there are debts that should be paid with it.’

‘Debts!’

It was the first word she spoke. She had heard of debt; she knew that it was a great calamity. Joconda had always spoken

of it as a great shame; she had seen the man of the law going into the wretched cabins of the neighbours more than once, and seizing and selling the very chattels of the cupboard, the very mattress of the bed; and at such a time Joconda had always said—‘they have burned their candle at both ends; they have eaten their Paschal lamb at Ognissanti; poor fools, poor knaves!’

She knew that debt had no more clung about Joconda’s honest name than ill-got gold had clung about her honest fingers.

‘You have got all the money she left,’ said one. ‘You are a brave and honest girl, Maria Penitente; you will pay me that *quintale* of hay for the mule——’

‘And my little bill for the coffee and the beans and the cheese,’ said another, who kept the small *pizzicheria* shop by the church. ‘It has run and run, goodness can tell how long, but I was never one to press; and we all knew that the old soul was safe and warm though she was niggard.’

‘And there are three pairs of boots owing to my husband,’ said the cobbler’s wife, who had come on his errand, because he was such a poor weak white-livered

thing himself; 'Joconda wore out a many boots; tramp, tramp, trot, trot, for ever as she did; and too proud-stomached ever to go *a scalza*——'

'There is a trifle of oil, a quarter-barrel; I let her have it last Night of the Kings as I had fetched it in from the country, thinking it only neighbourliness,' said a fourth, who had a year-old baby at her breast.

'And there were little sums I lent, on and off, not much; she put her cross for them; she was a lone creature; one could not be hard. I have got them all fair writ out, and her cross is at home in the book,' said the woman who lived next door, whose husband owned three of the fishing-smacks, and was a *strozzino* in a little hungry way, *i.e.* a usurer, who lent out small sums at large interest, and kept his gains in a deep well in the court of his old house, and could never sleep at night for thinking of them, and so was in a fair way to grace a mad-house before long: a man whom Santa Tarsilla cursed as it never had cursed Saturnino.

Musa was still and mute; she heard them; she stood erect in the centre of the floor where the sunlight made a golden glory all about her.

Old Andreino sidled through the vociferating knot of women, and came close to her and put his mouth to her ear.

‘Never listen to them; her debts were her own if she had any; let them take their scores to her grave. Come home with me, my dear, and bring the pitcher with you and we will count it all out fair and straight, and think what best to do with it; you might put it in my son’s wine shop, and he would give you good profit out of it, and so——’

Musa shook him off; she stood like one slowly awaking out of a hideous dream; she looked from his face to the faces of the women, and a darkness of scorn and of rage gathered over her own.

‘You all lie! You all lie!’ she said, sternly. ‘She never owed man or woman a handful of leaves, or a hank of wool, or a copper coin in all the days of her life. Never, never! She robbed herself to give to me. She robbed no other. Oh tongues false and accursed!—have you no fear when you lie of the dead?’

For a moment they were silenced before the intensity of scorn, the solemnity of rebuke. For a moment their falsehood and their greed shrivelled up as dry leaves

shrivel before a flame. But only for a moment, for they had so lied one to another that their lie almost seemed a truth to them ; almost they had persuaded even themselves that they had a right to the gold of the woman of Savoy.

‘ Would we come with false claims ? ’ they shrieked aloud in a chorus of wounded honour, and cried one against another, ‘ This is what comes of too great goodness ! We trusted a foreign woman, and we left her alone because she was old, and then, when her end comes, we are despoiled ! This is our reward ! This is the justice we get from aliens !——’

‘ Be quiet ! be quiet ! my dear friends— my good sweet neighbours ! ’ murmured the old man, running from one to another, and thinking to himself, ‘ Whether she owed them or not, not a stiver of that good money shall go in the maw of these pigs. No, no ; my grandson and I will do justice by her ; and if she love not the wineshop we might buy a share in a boat, or in the salt-working, or purchase a *pineto* and clear it——’

For as yet he did not know how much was in the pitcher or not ; but he was quite sure the amount must be large.

The women began to shriek more and more loudly; they screamed one against the other. Conscious that proofs were wanting they made up for lack of evidence with storm of noise; they howled aloud that they were honest as the day, and were robbed, they reviled the dead in her grave.

‘Proof! She wants proof!’ they yelled. ‘If we have no proof, or but little, it is because we were too good. We trusted an old lone creature. We let her take our substance and never asked her a quittance. We were too good, too simple, too long-suffering; and now we are cheated at last.’

Musa stood and looked at them; her face was pale and cold as marble, only in her eyes a passion of hatred and of scorn shone as the lightnings would shine at night in the purple skies of the summer.

She bore in silence for a while that hissing steam of angry breath, that harsh shrill uproar of abusive voices, their menacing hands that dashed about her in the air, their glittering eyes, that seemed to dart at her like snakes’ tongues in the sunrays. Then, all of a sudden, she stooped, lifted the loosened stone, and took up the pitcher from

the hole. She raised it above her head one instant, high above her head and their reach, as she had held a pitcher of water a thousand times if one.

‘ You are false and accursed,’ she said to them, and her voice was deep and clear, and smote them as if it were a sword. ‘ You are false and accursed ; and she owed no man or woman a thread in her garments, a crust in her mouth. She was honest and faithful and true, and cheated not a dog nor a mule of his rights. But all she has left—take ! Take and scramble for it like the thieves you are ; and may the bread and the wine that you buy with it blister your mouths and consume your bodies.’

Then with a single gesture of magnificent rage she dashed the pitcher down through the sunlight on to the floor amidst them ; it fell shattered in a score of pieces on the stones, and the coins rolled hither and thither, and their metal gleamed in the sunlight. The women threw themselves on them. The old man screamed.

Musa called Leone to her side, took the linen, and the summer and winter clothing that belonged to her, took the lute and the distaff, and the trifles that were her own,

passed into the adjacent chamber where the mule was stabled, bridled him and led him out into the open air, first having bound upon his back her own mattress, with its hempen sheeting and its coarse but warm blankets.

The women were yelling and quarrelling over the scattered coin; the old man was trying to snatch his share, and was buffeted and beaten between them. In their haste and their greed and their struggle they did not notice or know what she did.

Without looking back once she passed out of the old home of her childhood, and went out between the blocks of stone and the stunted aloes, leading the mule and followed by the dog.

She went straight across the tufa mounds, and the narrow paths crossing the reedy, moist soil, the rank grass lands, and the wild undergrowth that stretched around Santa Tarsilla, and walked slowly on and on, on and on, for eight miles, plunging into the deep woodland and entering the vast virgin meadows, until she came within sight of those cliffs of sandstone, where the tombs of the Tyrrhenes were hidden away behind the fence of thorny ruscus and the dense walls of bay.

‘*They* will not be angered against me, nor will *they* speak ill of her,’ she thought; and led the mule straight onward to the place she loved, where the tall leafy cork-trees rose up from the thickets, and the white-flowered cistus-bushes, and the hawthorns and the myrtles, and the yellow-blossoming Christ’s-thorn covered the burial-place of the Etruscan dead.

Intense heat still brooded over all the land, but she was used to it; it did not harm her.

For miles around there was nothing visible; not a sail in the distant sea, not a bird in the air, not a boar in the brakes, not a snake in the sand.

She led the old mule, and paced beside him; her heart was like a stone, her feet felt like lead; all at once she realised all that the faithful, kindly, fostering love of Joconda had been to her, and knew that it was gone from her for ever.

She went on with the animal through the hot white light, their shadows lying black behind them on the scorched grass and the grey sand. An immense sorrow had entered into her, and an immense regret. She thought—‘I was never thankful!’

She had not been thankful because she had not understood. As the child does not comprehend his cost to the mother who bore the burden of him, so she had never understood what she owed to the woman who had sheltered her nameless life.

She had taken all that was about her, as children do, unthinkingly; they do not ask why the sun shines, why the bread is there, why the roof is between their heads and the winter storm; these things are so; they accept them and do not question nor wonder. She had not been thankless; she had only been a child. Now she was a child no more. She had looked on death, and it had left her desolate.

She had made her mind up to go and dwell with those whom she had called her own people, in the twilight of the earth, underneath the grass and canes. She was sure that they would not repulse her.

She preferred their mute mercy to the clamouring greed of the living. What appalled her was, not that she was penniless, but that she was alone.

She went across the moor in the strong unchanging sunlight that, as the day grew apace, ceased to have even the relief of any

shade from leaf or blade of reed. She met no living thing. She uncovered the entrance of the tomb and descended the steps into it; and the mule, used to the stone stairs that led to his own stable, was with little trouble induced to follow. She unloaded the things off his back and laid them down; she took her sickle and went up into the air and cut thistles and dry grass for him, and filled a stoup of water at the half-dried pool, and stabled him there in as much comfort as she could. Then she gathered sticks together, and lit a fire on the stones of the entrance-place, and set a little soup-pot on to boil with some herbs and beans and fish in it that she had brought, with some rough bread, to make her midday meal.

The food seemed to choke her, but she ate, being young and in health, so that hunger came to her despite her sorrow.

When she had eaten she laid her bed-clothes on the stone couch that had served for the last sleep of the Etruscan Lucumo, and sat down in the soft grey gloom of the twilit place, sheltered from the glare and scorch of day, and said to herself, 'my home is here.'

Santa Tarsilla was no more her home.

It was full of liars and of thieves. She abhorred it. Though its sands were to become full of silver ore, as the soil of Populonia once had been, she said to herself that never again should her feet tread them.

Let them keep the money and kill each other fighting over it !

She almost smiled as she sat there in the gloom and thought of old Andreino beaten to and fro by the struggling women, and clutching at the coins and shrieking in his feeble treble.

‘ One would think that gold were God ! ’ she thought ; remembering how but three days before the galley-slave had robbed her : robbed the tomb that was sacred, the dead that were defenceless.

The terror of her own lonely and hapless fate looked at her from the awful eyes of the sculptured Chimæra and the frowning brows of the painted Typhon ; yet so consoled was she to be in this silent sanctuary that she began to think of her future maintenance and her future liberty here with a sense of deliverance rather than of danger. There would indeed, she knew, be no means of gaining any livelihood here. She could spin well, but so could every one else in the

province, and she could make nets with skill, but so could every fisherman on the sea-board: and there was nothing beyond these to do.

Work is the political economist's one advice and panacea; but there are many places in the world where it is not possible to work, and the Maremma in summer-time is one of them. There is nothing to labour at; all has been already done by the army of labourers that stream down from the mountains. The few that are left lie in the sun and think themselves blessed if they do not sicken or starve; many do both.

But of sickness she had no fear, and she was not even afraid of famine.

She thought if she could manage to make her bread from the *saggina*, or wild oats, that grew all around she could live here well enough. She scarcely, indeed, took more thought of what might be her bodily privation than the nightingales coming back, whilst the days are still short and the woodlands still brown with their first budding, take heed of the wild weather that may come to still their song and stay their courting.

She had never known any kind of indulgence or fastidious appetite. She had

always eaten sparingly of the simplest food ; the idea that she might have only a bit of oaten bread for weeks together did not frighten her. She was very well aware that she would have to depend on what her own hands could gather.

The old mule was lying down on the litter of dry grasses ; the dog was asleep, for he was old too and soon drowsy ; the twilight of the tomb was like the soft shadows that herald the dawn ; the painted shapes upon the walls played on their pipes, and wreathed their garlands, and danced in the border of lotus flower ; outside, the burning day was fierce and white, the animal life of the moors was all hidden and still, there was only the rustle of the snake through the tall stalks of the distaff-canes, the hoot of the cicala swinging high on the caroba¹ boughs : the sound of the insects' odd singing came faintly into the stillness of the tombs.

‘ If only she were here ! ’ thought Musa.

Who had been those vanished people who had known so well how to cherish their dead and put them gently away in their painted chambers with the toys of their infancy, or the weapons of their manhood, or the

¹ *Ceratonia siliqua*.

jewels of their virginal or matronly pride, tenderly placed beside them? Who had they been, those forgotten peoples, who robbed death of half its terrors, and laid the dog beside his master, the toy beside the child, in cool, fresh, sacred chambers where the dead seemed not dead but waiting?

Ah! why was she not here!—she, who was thrust into that hole in the sand, in that box of pitch-pine, thrust out of life with unseemly haste, with a brutal eagerness to be rid of her and forget that ever she had been.

Musa could not have reasoned out the thing she felt; but the ghastly rites, the hideous selfishness, the vulgar hurrying cruelty, that mark out the Christian treatment of the dead weighed on her with their harshness and their horror as she sat in these graves of the Etruscans—made ere men had heard of Christ.

Then for the first time a few great tears rushed into her eyes and she wept bitterly, and, thus weeping, fell at the last asleep, in a merciful sleep that lasted through several hours, while the hot day throbbed itself away without, and the rays of the sun beat in vain upon her resting-place and could not enter.

When she awoke it was dark ; night-herons, early come from the north on their voyage to Egypt, flying over the marshes sent forth their loud harsh croak. She mounted the stairs and looked upward, and guessed the hour by the place of the evening star, and the look of the heavens. She went down again and ate a little and drank some water, fed the dog and the mule, shut them both in the chamber, and went out into the open air.

She had an errand to do, with which, undone, it seemed to her she could not sleep. A strange fancy had come to her, and the fancy assumed the shape of duty to her ; of a duty of gratitude so imperative that it would have been a guilt in her sight to evade its execution.

The uneducated are perhaps unjustly judged sometimes. To the ignorant both right and wrong are only instincts ; when one remembers their piteous and innocent confusion of ideas, the twilight of dim comprehension in which they dwell, one feels that oftentimes the laws of cultured men are too hard on them, and that, in a better sense than that of injustice and reproach, there ought indeed to be two laws for rich and poor.

Musa walked through the still sultry night.

There was a haze of heat over the heavens that obscured the stars, and there was no moon.

When she reached the entrance of Santa Tarsilla it was midnight and quite dark. There were no lights in any of the houses ; far down the coast there was the gleam of the pharos of Orbetello : all else on sea and earth was in impenetrable gloom.

She, who had known the ways of the place from infancy, made no error in her going. She took her path straight to that field of death where they had laid Joconda.

The walls of the cemetery were low and white ; one of them was washed by the sea. Her eyes, grown accustomed to the blackness of the moonless air, discerned the outline of the walls, and over the inland one, nearest to her, she leaped with the agility of her strong youth, and slowly took her road over the rough clods and the rough grass of the enclosure.

Then she lit a lantern she had brought with her, and by its light found her way to the freshest grave that was there, hard by the sea wall.

The earth lay all broken up into hard

clods and heavy lumps as the earth, when sun-baked by a scorching midsummer, always lies, beat it as spade and hoe may. She stood by it, looking down on it timidly and tenderly with yearning eyes awhile; then she lifted her lantern and went to the little white-washed shed which served as a funeral chapel.

There was a toolhouse close by it, the door of which was never shut; she went in and got a pickaxe and other tools and returned with them to the grave of Joconda.

She began to loosen the earth; that brutal earth which lay so heavily on the breast of her best friend.

Southward on the sea there was now a crowd of lights burning yellow against the deep blue of the summer night; the men of the Orbetellano were spearing the fish frightened and blinded by the blaze of lanterns. But there was no sound in all the place except the ripple of the water against the low mortared wall. Once a dog, far away in the fields, barked.

She laboured on undisturbed.

The earth loosened when so dry does not readily adhere together again, and the clods were all easy to remove. In an hour's time

she had uncovered the rough deal box that they had called Joconda's coffin.

She took breath and leaned against the wall and gazed down into the chasm. Before womanhood had fully opened for her she knew the doom that comes with age. She lived with the lost dead instead of with the living.

A deep-toned clock in the house nearest struck faintly the seventh hour ; the old way of counting time still prevails in Maremma. It was, as we say, one hour after midnight. The fear of interruption gave her fresh strength and energy. She knew that to raise the coffin would be more difficult than to uncover it ; but she descended into the pit, tied cords about it, and, after another hour's hard and patient toil, raised it up on to the ground above.

Then she trembled ; the great dews rolled off her forehead ; in the hot night she grew cold.

The only human soul that had ever loved her was there at her feet, helpless and senseless as the clods of clay—no more a human creature, but a thing thrust out of sight and forgotten of all.

She shivered as she looked on it ; then

she took up her spade and shovelled in the earth; dry as it had been, and loose, she knew that in the morning it would bear no sign of disturbance to careless eyes, and that most likely there would not be even a careless glance cast on that waste corner by the old sea wall.

When it was all filled in, the earth was lower than it had been, but this would seem no more than the natural in-sinking of the soil. She rested once again, a moment, from her labour, and drew breath again for her heaviest trial of strength, the lifting of the coffin over the wall and into the boat beneath. She had great strength in her symmetrical limbs; she was shaped as nobly as a Greek statue, and in her beautiful arms, her straight limbs, her superb hips, there was no less force than grace. From her childhood upward the sea had bathed, the wind had fed, the sweetness of sound sleep and the tonic of athletic exercise had nourished her. Beside the sun-starved, room-cooped prisoners of the factory and of the school-room she would have been as Atalanta beside the dried and shrivelled atomy of a specimen-jar. With all her strength now she raised the coffin by the cords she had knotted

about it, dragged it up on to the wall beside her, which was of breadth enough to afford safe footing, and thence by degrees lowered it into the old wooden craft, half boat, half tub, belonging to Andreino in which she had spent her happiest hours.

She descended into the punt, laid the coffin reverently at her feet, loosened the chain from the staple, and, taking up her oars, bent over them and began to row back to the place on the sea-shore where she had rescued the galley-slave Mastarna.

She was drenched with the sweat of exertion, she was cold with a nameless terror, she was aching in every muscle with the strain of her over-wrought labour. But she was content. She had done her duty as she saw it. When her eyes rested on the deal surface of the oblong thing at her feet, she thought tenderly,

‘Surely she knows ; surely she is glad I take her to them ?’

It had seemed to her so brutal, so vile, so thankless to thrust the dead, only because it *was* dead, into the earth, in a waste hole of ground, and leave it alone to the growth of the rank grass and the thistle, to the companionship of the newt and the worm.

The sea was perfectly placid; the air was still without wind; the moon had now risen, and seemed like a friend in the sky. In Santa Tarsilla no one had awakened; all was still. She was safe, and her errand was done.

When at length the boat reached the place on the sands where the low myrtles and rosemary grew well-nigh to the edge of the sea—the place where Saturnino had sat on the sand and cursed mankind and his own soul—the lovely vermilion hue of early daybreak in the Maremma was slowly spreading over the heavens.

She sprang into the water, and with infinite tenderness and solemn care drew the boat with its freight upon the shore, amidst the sea-stocks and the samphire.

Then she dragged her weary feet over the three miles of heath that lay between her and the Etruscan tomb. She went down into the grave, stirred the old mule from his slumber, and placed his pack-saddle on his back; followed by Leone, she led him by the bridle to the shore. She was now so fatigued that her limbs shook under her, and her head swam. But she pursued her way.

Reaching the edge of the waves, she

drew out the coffin from its shelter beneath the shrubs, raised it with great difficulty on to the pack-saddle and fastened it there ; then once more, with her hand on the mule's bridle, and with the dog beside her silent and subdued, she went back, now not alone, to the grave of the kings.

As she went—the mule patiently bearing the burden of the dead mistress who had fed and tended him for twenty years, rendering his owner this last service ere he, too, should fall away into the uselessness of age, into the darkness of death—Musa looked back once at the open sea.

The rose of dawn was all above her head, the waters lay wide and peaceful in the sweet mysterious light.

Her heart was full.

‘ Surely she must be glad,’ she thought ; ‘ she will be with us, and she will know that I did not forget.’





CHAPTER XIII.

THE removal of Joconda's body from its grave was never noticed by the sacristan of Santa Tarsilla, or by any one of her neighbours.

No one ever went nigh that rough space of ground under the sea wall. They had done with her when they had buried her. When the torch of Andreino had flared itself out, the last rite of remembrance had been finished for ever.

Santa Tarsilla was like the greater world that lay around outside its desolate plains and swamps.

‘That girl is a base one,’ said the neighbours; ‘never so much as a wooden cross has she set above the grave, or a two-soldo print of a saint has she hung above it!’

They knew she had gone to live away on the moors ; where, they were not sure ; it was a matter of indifference. They had got the money, and had torn each other well-nigh to pieces over it ; they were readier to forget her than to recall her. If she had come back she might have demanded some clear account of their alleged claims, and to satisfy her would have been awkward. The landlord, or rather his steward, for the landlord was a gay noble, far away, came and looked about the house, and affirmed that he had a title to a year's rental, and sold the sticks of furniture, and the pots and pans, the mattress on which Joconda had lain every night till she had slept on it her last sleep, and the porridge-pot from which she had given the child of Saturnino her first bit and sup.

The landlord was far away ; the steward pocketed the proceeds of the sale, though Joconda had paid her rent beforehand, as every tenant does in Italy ; and he took credit to himself, as he conversed with the people, that he did not find the girl out, and make her render him up the mule. So an honest life went out under the smirch of calumny, as a sweet-smelling pine-cone goes

out in smoke when it is thrown on a coke fire.

In Santa Tarsilla the August weather was hot with the cruel, unchanging, misty heat that breeds all manner of disease from the waters and the earth, and which is only good for the lecherous vine that strangles the maples it clings to, and lives on to steal the soul out of man by and by, and vines are there none in Maremma.

After the momentary excitation following on Joconda's death and legacy, the few inhabitants returned to the dull, dropsical apathy in which they were wont to pass their lives. The girl was somewhere on the moors, and Andreino's boat was missing one night from its mooring by the mole, though replaced the next; but it was no concern of theirs. Curiosity consents to close its unwinking eyes when interest sings its lullaby.

Old Andreino had, indeed, spasms of the pain of conscience, for in his way he had been fond of Musa, and had a regard for the woman of Savoy. But he never sought for her. Nay, if he had not been ashamed to put up such a prayer to his saint, he would have entreated S. Andrea to grant

him never to see her face again, since he felt that the rebuke and the reproach of those magnificent jewel-like eyes would be very hard to bear, and he remembered how strong her wrist was, and if it should please her to belabour him with one of his own oars he would be as a rush in the grasp of the reed-cutter. And when his conscience pricked him, he felt that he had behaved not nobly ; and he was sorry for his conduct ; for, after all, the women had hustled him so that he had not been able to get one single coin that had rolled out of the pitcher.

‘I might just as well have stood up for her,’ he thought woefully ; ‘and after all she might in time have come to think of our little Nandino. I was too quick with her, that is the truth ; and then those hags came in between us with their screeching—well, the Saints grant me not to see her face !’

He was terribly afraid lest he should see her. When he sat on the mole smoking his pipe as the shadows lengthened, he scanned anxiously the open sea and the low shore in fear lest he should behold the figure of Musa coming between him and the evening sky.

But the days and the weeks and the months went by, and she never came back to Santa Tarsilla.

One night Santa Tarsilla, which never hardly heard any news at all (the only news-sheet in the place being the priest's copy of the *Voce della Verità*), was a little stirred out of its feeble, feverish drowsiness by hearing that the escaped galley-slave Saturnino Mastarna had been captured afresh : taken by the carabinieri after a fierce fight, having been discovered as he was hiding in a wine-shop in the hamlet of Saturnia, whose owner, a widow woman, had gone into Orbetello to sell some Etruscan ornaments and an Etruscan crown of oak leaves to a goldsmith.

The woman's poverty, and her halting story to the goldsmith, had roused the suspicions of the police, and the carabinieri, entering her house by force, had shot down Saturnino through the keyhole of a door, and had seized him, after being crushed by his arms and rent with his teeth where he lay shot on the ground, as though he were a beast of prey they were driving out of its lair.

Wounded and disabled, but not so greatly as to be thought in peril of his life, the

once famous brigand had been borne to the casemates of Orbetello, thence to go back to his doom on Gorgona. So the pale, emaciated, fever-shaken coastguards said one night, standing about on the mole, and smoking their rank tobacco.

More than fourteen years had gone since the name of Saturnino had been at once the pride and the terror of Maremma, and the legends of him had faded off the minds of the people, as the frescoes of their churches faded in the damp of ages. Yet when they heard his name again—that name which had been as a trumpet-call, as an incantation, as the belling of the king-stag in the forest to his herd—even the sickly women lifted their heads, even the palsied men took their pipes from their mouths: ‘he *was* a man!’ they said softly, under their breath.

The mountain robber always bewitches the fancy of the multitude, and the robbery which only strikes at the rich always seems a sort of rough justice to the poor: the argument of the bandit is the argument of the socialist couched in simpler language.

Beneath their subjugation by that witchery of adventure and of defiance, which allure the imagination of the populace, there is

always, also, this resentful thought—he is condemned, this bold marauder who carries his life in hand, whilst the sleek poltroons, the thieves in broadcloth and fine linen, the Barabbi of commerce, stalk abroad through the tens of thousands they have duped or ruined, untouched by law, undenounced by any wrath of earth or wrath of heaven. The preference of the multitude may be unsound morality, but it has a wild justice and a rude logic at its base.

Santa Tarsilla once more lamented for Saturnino. It was of the same mind with the mob of Orbetello, which, could it have got at the woman whose stupidity had cost him his liberty, would have made her rue that ever she had been born.

In like manner all the villages and the towns in Maremma mourned for him ; feeling pity and pain for the old eagle of their rocks who had broken loose from his cage only to be trapped afresh. He had once been the glory of Maremma ; the country was hurt in its own pride to think that their hero was dealt with like any mean cut-purse of the cities.

Even to little San Lionardo the tidings of his sad fate travelled ; travelled by the

mouth of a *sensale* ; that is, a go-between, who negotiates with the farmers or shepherds who sell cattle, and the butchers or breeders who buy them.

Owners and buyers would be much better served if they did their own negotiations without the middleman ; but Italy is the land of go-betweens, in commerce as in love, and these men swarm over the land and fill their money-bags not ill nor slowly.

This one, riding about the moors in the evening time, viewing herds and flocks, had business which took him to San Lionardo ; a little white-washed place lying on the amethyst and pearl-grey of the hills like a humble sea-shell on a grand table of *pietra dura* and mosaic.

San Lionardo never knew anything unless by some rare stray visit of a pedlar or of a dealer ; it had very few dwellers in it, and had not even a church or a priest. When any were wedded or buried in the hamlet they had to go up miles above, along the road that wound over the bare face of the stone mountain, where every tree and shrub had been felled, and the sun scorched the rock, that had not the shade of even a leaf or a blade of grass.

These little white hamlets and towns of Italy glisten all over her long, low, mountain sides, their church towers red-roofed with tiles, or brown with wooden belfry, or pointed with the air-perched statue of a saint in their midst, and not seldom around them the circle of broken walls which tells the tale of their ancientness and of their bygone wars. Oftentimes they are old as Rome itself; classic as Tusculum; full of memories as the foundations of Troy; but no one comes to them. They are little, lonely, humble places now, far out of the highways of men; and, save their spinning-women, and their hinds and herdsmen, and their priest, they shelter no living thing. When winter comes, they are severed by unbridged torrents even from other villages that lie along the same line of hills; and up to their heights in the snow, or in the heat, no traveller ever wanders.

There is something quaint, pathetic, touching, in the lives that begin and end in these solitary places; the hamlet is the nation of its people, and the church tower to them is the centre of the world. The great plains lie beneath them, and often from their walls the sea is visible, but the

cities and the seas of the world are nought to them ; their history lies in Pippa's plaiting, in Sandro's bridal, in the birth of children, in the huckster's price for wool and linen. They are peaceful lives ; simple, archaic, close-clinging about tradition, more innocent than most lives are ; when they are no more on the face of the mountains men will be sadder, and earth will be the poorer.

Into San Lionardo the *sensale* came this day, and, drinking his thin red wine at the tavern door, told the few people of the hamlet how the brigand had been captured, away there in Orbetello. There was a little fellow there who heard, while his goats and he were lying in the shade of the house wall.

The little fellow was Zefferino, whom his village called Zirlo, who had taken his goats up to the hills out of the heat, and who listened as he lay in the shade on the stones.

When he could take his flock again on to the lower lands, in the greyness of dawn, which is the freshest hour at this season, he lost no time in descending the mountain side and making for the moor,

until he came to broad pools, laden with golden and white water-lilies, and cliffs of sandstone broken by strata of palombino, of macigno, and of travertine.

There he whistled like the thrush.

'*Via!*' cried the voice of a girl from beneath his feet, and presently the face and throat of Musa raised themselves from out of the acanthus and alaternus and enchanter's nightshade that grew about the entrance of the tomb. She lifted him up a little brown earthenware can; he took it and milked one of his ewes, and handed the can back to her full of milk. She had been up an hour; her brilliant face was like a flower in its freshness, for she bathed herself in the sea every daybreak; her hair was brushed back in its massive undulations and just touched her throat, as Joconda had always kept it; her clothes were still of the linen-cloth Joconda had spun.

She took the milk and gave him a little copper coin, and came up with a piece of black bread in her hand, and ate the bread and drank the milk, sitting on a stone amongst the wild clematis, and sharing her meal with Leone.

She had made friends with Zefferino;

there was a certain distance between them always because he was a little afraid of her, and she was a little suspicious of him. He had been forced to swear to her that he would tell no one how or where she dwelt, and having sworn this, he shared her confidence. One thing alone she never told him, that she had brought the coffin of Joconda there, and had laid it in an inner chamber of the painted tombs.

He was of use to her.

She cut the lake-rush and the chair-maker's-rush and wove them into rude matting and into frail baskets, and he sold these to San Lionardo folk for a few centimes. She had learned many uses of edible roots and cryptogams from Joconda, and gathered those, and he sold them also ; he brought her flax and she spun it ; he brought her straw and she plaited it ; when his goats were on the hills and his smaller brother minded them, he had run to and fro on her errands. Busy and fond of money, which his father never let him handle, he was glad to go between moorland and mountain on these missions, and could cheat her comfortably with a childish glee that was united with a shrewd self-interest.

He was only a little fellow, living, with his goats and his reed-pipe and his naked feet, the most sylvan and pastoral life in the world; but he knew the worth of money as well as the bailiff adding up figures in his fat note-book, or the innkeeper selling watered draughts to thirsty wayfarers.

Zefferino was a pretty little curly-headed boy, with a sweet voice, a sunny smile, and limbs like a child-Bacchus; he was affectionate and he was very innocent, but all the same he knew how to lie and he knew how to cheat, his round laughing eyes open and candid all the while, and his mouth smiling.

Why not? Had he not seen the wine-carriers bore the hole in the cask and suck the wine out with a straw, and sell such a drink to anybody on the road? Had he not always heard his father, bartering with the cattle-dealer, say, 'And what will there be as *mancia* for me?' which meant, 'How much will you let me rob my friend if I induce him to sell you this beast?'

So he himself robbed this strange maiden, of whom he was half frightened always; yet he loved her and admired her in his half-hearted way, and kept her secret

for her, because he thought if others knew that she lived here down in the ground they might do what she wanted, and so he would lose the taste of her *pratajoli buoni*¹ and blackberries and broth, and all those centimes that got him bread and polenta and salt fish and rude sweetmeats, such as old Deaneira sold in San Lionardo, sitting at the stall under the battered Madonna in her iron cage, against the old watch-tower wall, that looked down from the hills on moor and sea.

‘Are you happy here?’ he asked her now, sitting with his legs drawn up amongst the purple loosestrife, all dry with the past summer heat; watching her as she ate, while his goats strayed about, cropping what they would, the fourfooted Huns that ravage the mountains and the forests and lay them bare as with fire, so that nothing will ever spring again where their little hoofs have trodden and their little teeth have browsed.

‘Happy!’ echoed Musa; the word sounded strangely. ‘I do not know. I am alone; that is always good.’

She had never heard of Chateaubriand, who wrote above his house in the depth of

¹ *Agaricus campestris*.

the Bréton solitudes, à l'abri des hommes. But the spirit that moved him to write it was in her.

Zirlo tilted himself over on his back.

He was a child, so he let the reply he had had go by without compliment. He said instead :

‘I forgot to tell you, Saturnino is taken.’

‘Taken!’

She left off eating and stared at him, with a light in her gaze and a flush on her cheek.

‘Yes. On the coast. A woman was selling his gold things for him, and they shot him down in the Orbetellano.’

She leapt to her feet, her eyes flashed, her whole face lit up with exultation.

‘Selling my gold—*their* gold! They took him so? I am glad! I am glad!’

‘It was not yours,’ said Zefferino, who knew from her what the galley-slave had done.

‘No. It was *theirs*. It was sacred. He stole it; he is well served. If it had been my own I would not have minded; but a thing that belonged to the dead!—oh, it was vile, vile! And I wronged Joconda that I might feed him; I left her alone to return to him, and she died; I am glad

indeed that they have got him. Are you certain it is true?’

‘Oh, yes,’ said the little lad; ‘they shot him down as they shoot the roebucks here, and took him; he was alive, though badly hurt. He fought like a devil, but there was the whole troop of the carabinieri all there. They do say that another one, who got away from Gorgona with him, is loose still, hiding somewhere in the hills, but about that I do not know much. But there is a reward for anyone who sees him, and I mean to look about; I might get the money as well as another.’

‘I am glad he is taken,’ said Musa, unheeding; ‘I am glad. He robbed them and he was false to me.’

Zirlo shuddered. Had he not himself cheated her to go and nibble at mother Deaneira’s stall?

‘You are savage,’ he said with a little whimper and tremor. ‘That poor soul was a brave man they say, and never did any sin except lightening rich men’s purses; he used to live upon the mountains, right away there as high as the stars are, and never touched a poor man; they all say so,—only the rich——’

‘And is not the gold of the rich their own as well as the crust of the poor?’ said Musa with scorn in her low tones. ‘He was a thief; a thief; and a traitor. I sheltered him, and he robbed the dead. He was a thief and a traitor.’

Zirlo rolled over and hid his face in the green *bichierini*,¹ pretending to catch a lizard. He had gone back into the tombs the very day after the galley-slave had robbed them, conquering his abject fear of the place for sake of the gold toys and the gold lamps that he too would have taken if he could only have found them.

‘And I should not have been a thief,’ thought Zirlo, with national sophistry instinctive in him. ‘I should not have been a thief; they belonged to nobody; they were as much mine as hers.’

Yet not for worlds would he have had her know that he had ever crept into the graves on any such errand.

‘He was a thief and a traitor. And he was taken as he sold the gold? I am glad,’ she said once more, and her face was exultant, sombre, almost cruel.

The fate of the robber of the tombs

¹ *Lichen pyxidatus*.

seemed to her so just; it was almost beautiful in its inexorable and instant justice.

‘You are savage,’ said Zirlo.

‘Why not?’ she answered; to be savage was right enough; it was what they called the boar, when he fought for his own poor life, and his own lair in the thickets.

The boy said nothing. He was frightened. If ever she knew, he thought, of those centuries?

Musa rose, leaving the rest of her bread uneaten, and dropping it between the paws of the dog.

‘He wronged my shelter and betrayed me,’ she said once more. ‘He has met a right fate. Zirlo, drive your goats farther on; my mule needs this forage.’

Zirlo rose and mutely obeyed.

His heart was beating. He wished that the polenta and baccala that had tempted him, and that old Deaneira’s luscious muscat wine that was like the honey of thyme-fed bees, had all been down the throats of the people of San Lionardo instead of down his own.

‘If ever she know, she will beat me

black and blue, or throw me with one hand into the sea,' thought the little sinner miserably.

She went down into the tomb, and brought the mule up to pasture while there was still some coolness and shade; then she again descended, lit her little fire and put on her pot with fish and herbs to stew by noontide, and took up her distaff and went and sat in the open air once more.

She was oppressed and absorbed by the tidings of the galley-slave's capture. She was glad; yes, she was glad; but the gladness began to glow less hotly in her: she thought of the wretched homeless fugitive as he had sat on the sands after her rescue of him: for what had she rescued him?—only for fresh torture.

All was still around her in the hush of early day: the only sound was the insect life that is never still on those moors and marshes night and day. The first heavy rains of September had fallen and the refreshed earth was growing once more green, and the faded leaves arose and stood out in the clear air. The snakes were sorry the drought was gone, but all other living things were glad.

Zirlo, who had sent his goats farther away, strayed back and stood looking at old Cecco, the mule.

‘He is of no use to you?’ he said timidly.

‘No use ; no.’

‘Would you not sell him?’ he said more timidly too, thinking of the *sensale*.

‘I would not sell him.’

‘You would get money for him—much money——’

‘I do not want money.’

‘But you want to eat.’

‘I get enough to do that.’

‘He is old——’

‘The more reason to keep him by me ; old things fare ill with strangers.’

Zirlo eyed the mule wistfully, and went away a little sulky and a good deal afraid.

‘What will you do in the winter?’ he said fretfully. ‘I cannot leave the goats to run your errands in the winter. Sometimes it snows, too, and I am always very busy. You must go up and live in San Lionardo ; that is what you must do.’

‘I shall not do that,’ said Musa ; ‘I shall live where I am. You will do my errands

in winter and in summer both when you want a bowl full of soup or a handful of mushrooms.'

Then Zefferino cried.

He did not like her to fancy him selfish.

'For if she once think me so,' he thought, 'she will begin to doubt, and to count the centimes.'

But Musa did not count the centimes.

When the heat of noon came, she took the mule down into the painted chambers of the dead, and sat there herself. Zirlo came too;—a pretty little quaint figure, a childish Faunus;—and asked her for a bowl of soup. Then together they ate, using the black earthenware cups and platters that had been strewn on the floor of the tombs: cups and platters made two thousand years before, made for the banquets of the dead, and perhaps profaned by their young lips, yet innocently so.





CHAPTER XIV.

SO the days passed by and the weeks and the months, and the life was always the same there.

The death of Joconda had left an awful blank of silence and loneliness around her. In its desolation she realised all that the dead woman had been to, and had done for, her, and a great remorse entered into her. She had been too thankless, she had been indifferent, unthinking, hard of heart, so she thought; and she would have given her life to have those brown, wrinkled, rough hands in hers for one hour.

Apart from this great sorrow she was happy in her wild, lonely life on the moor. She had no one to say her yea or nay. She was as free as the wild boar himself; and

the wholesome winds of the west blew against her face, and nigh at hand was the green autumn of Maremma.

So she took up her domicile in earnest there, and ceased to feel desolate.

The jewellery was all that Saturnino had robbed from the tombs, and the utensils of bronze and of pottery served all her daily needs. Untroubled by any knowledge of their history and antiquity, yet vaguely moved to reverent use of them because they belonged to these dead owners of the place, whom she revered, she took the bronze *oinochoë* with her to the water spring, she set her herb-soup on the embers in the bronze *situla*, she made her oaten bread in the embossed *phiale*, she drank the broth out of the painted *depas*, shaped like that cup of the sun in which the Python Slayer once passed across the sea. She used all these things reverently, washed them with careful hands, and never thought they were dishonoured thus.

The Typhon frowned at her from the ceiling of the tomb, and the Dii Involuti turned their impassive faces on her every time she passed out of the stone doors or climbed the steep stair passage to the

open air ; but she knew nothing of their dread attributes, and though they awed her they did not fill her with any painful fear. She did not understand them ; there was no one to explain to her the meanings of the paintings, and carvings, and the letters on the walls ; but she grew into a great and tender sympathy with them which was in itself a sort of comprehension.

Even of the terrible shapes she had no fear ; the dread winged boy with hoary locks of age, that the Etruscans feared as higher than the gods, had no terror in his frown for her ; and the veiled divinities who sat beside the inner door of the warrior's tomb, who for the dead had been tyrants of fate, mystic, inscrutable, omnipotent, grew to be to her as playmates and as friends. The very twilight and hush and solemn sadness of this place were but so much added sweetness to her. And in her there seemed to have been always that melancholy, and that obedience to destiny, which were the characteristics of the Etruscan religion, even when most they loved the lyre and the lotus garland and the brimming rhyton.

Here was her refuge, her palace, her place of sanctity and dreams ; here the

native unconscious poetry and passion in her found a likeness to themselves, a consolation for the unlovely life that seemed to pollute the sea and shore in the only group of human habitations that she knew, and which hurt her without her ever tracing the why or wherefore.

She managed to live very well; her wants were few, and the moors supplied all save one or two of her needs, such as oil to burn, and flax to spin, and hens to keep for eggs, and these Zefferino brought to her, being paid for them with scrupulous punctuality out of the two silver pieces that she possessed.

She found she could cut the wild oats in plenty for the old mule, which was all she needed herself, since she could live on the bread she so made, and she could make enough any day in the year for herself and the dog.

It is wonderful how few are the actual wants of a human life that is far away from all artificial stimulus and necessities.

She was up as soon as the white gleam of dawn showed above the barren mountains of the eastern sky-line, and, long before the heavens there grew warm with that sunrise

flush which is as bright and deep a rose as any oleander-flower, she said her Latin prayer at daybreak beside the coffin of Joconda, as she had been used to do by her side, tended the mule and the dog, baked her rude loaves, and swept over and burnished her stone chambers and her bronze utensils with those northern habits of cleanliness and order in which the woman of Savoy had reared her.

Then she was free to roam all the day long, and go out upon the sea as she might choose ; every day she dipped and dived and swam like any gannet. She bathed twice daily, either in fresh water or salt water, with as much zest as her winged comrades ; and she kept her thick hair, that clustered like the bronze curls of a Greek bust, and all her simple apparel clean and in order, obeying all that dead Joconda had enjoined on her as her daily habits, with as implicit an obedience as ever on that soil the Etruscans had shown to the commands of Tages.

That was her fashion of repentance for many a moment of petulance, and many an hour of wilful indifference, which were to her memory as the sting of the spine of the yucca is to the flesh.

Now and then, faintly from a distance, the bells of some hamlet or of some monastery would ring over the plains, and be wafted by the wind to her ear; now and then some shot would sound from some little lagoon, or some thicket of box elder, and wild olive, where the strangers were slaying the natives of the marsh and the moor; this was all she heard of the living world, and she desired to learn no more. She lived with the dead; and something of their cold repose, their ineffable indifference, their passionless defiance of mankind, had come upon her and entered her soul.

She had quite forgotten she was young. She had never known that she was beautiful.

She was not afraid of anything; she had the courage of Saturnino in her blood, and with it the superb innocence of a child's soul that has never been dimmed by the breath of folly.

Whilst it was summer weather even shepherds and herdsmen were never seen; the flocks were on the mountain, the harvests had been reaped at midsummer, the chase was forbidden by the law; all Maremma was as silent as the heart of the Sahara. Some-

times, against the law, which is utterly defied in this respect all over the country, men would come over the scorching moor at eventide to set their fell net, the square *paratoio* with its fettered call-bird, and would watch all night at peril of their lives from the swamp-gases, and at daybreak would carry away their poor fluttering struggling prey. But even these were few and far between, because the fever and ague of the marshes had terrors enough to daunt and conquer greed.

In summer she and Zefferino had these moors to themselves, and even Zefferino had been more alarmed at the heat and the fever than she, and stayed for days together upon the wooded spur of his native mountain, where the miasma seldom reached.

So the long days went by, one by one, and were not long to her ; and at noontide she slept soundly and dreamlessly within the cool solitude of the tombs, safe as a mole in his castle, refreshed as a coot on the breast of the pool. In the short nights, above all when they were moonlit, she did not care to sleep ; she sat at the entrance of the graves with the white dog like a carved marble thing at her feet, and watched the sylvan

life that stirs at dark flit over the face of the sky or the shadows of the earth. She could not see the sea, the growth of the low woodland was too thick, but she could hear the surf breaking on the shore, and often when a steamer was passing, or a brig coasting, or a fishing barque standing in under the wind, she could hear the beat of paddles or the rattling of halyards or the voices of fishermen calling to each other.

The sea was near enough to give the sweet sense of its strong companionship, and if she climbed the sandstone only a little way and overlooked the darksome stretch of myrtle and oak scrub, she could, at any moonlit hour, see it sparkling underneath the stars, flowing away into the infinite space of the clouds and the night, phosphorescent, radiant, hushed—the black fantastic crags of Elba borne upon its waters like a barque.

So the end of the summer passed with her untroubled except by that sense of ingratitude towards her lost friend which lay like a stone on her heart. Whenever she knelt by the coffin she said at the close of her prayers always: ‘Dear and good one, forgive me. I was blind!’

The need of companionship never

weighed on her. She was unconsciously happy in the air, in the liberty, in the delightful sense of healthful and untrammelled life.

Her mind busied itself with its own vague imaginations, and her mode of life was filled with that sombre mystery which she loved as the Etruscan race had loved it. If she had been shut in the garret or the factory-room of a city, this temper would have become morbid and dangerous in her ; but, braced by the daily physical labours of her life, and by the abundant and vigorous exercise of all her bodily powers, it only served to give a solace, and a sort of sublimity, to a fate which would have seemed to many hard and friendless. The moorlands and the moorland sepulchres were made for her and she for them.

The visits of little Zefferino kept her from that absolute solitude which in time hurts the mind and distorts it. He was a very human little thing ; greedy, playful, timid, kindly when it cost him nothing, most kindly when he gained most by it ; a complete little epitome of humanity clothed in shaggy goat's hair.

She grew fond of the child, and was in-

dulgent to him with that indulgence of the strong to the weak which is often misunderstood, abused, and preyed upon by the feeble. She knew that he told lies by the hundred, and pilfered when he could, and had no more real heart in him than the red and white pumpkin that keeps the beauty of its quaint shell whilst the summer sun has sucked up all its pulp inside it. Yet he was loving and lovable in his own way, and Musa, who thought he loved her, was glad to see him always as she was glad to see the birds and flowers.

They were more truly her companions, however, than he. She was always in the air, except when the sudden and frequent storms of the Maremma drove her perforce into the shelter of the sepulchre, although the 'bolt-hurling gods' of the tempests had no terror for her as they had had for the Tyrrhenian multitude who had seen divine wrath in every electric flash, and heard imprecation and prophecy in every roll of thunder that echoed from the Apennine to the Ciminian hills.

The white straight rain, the slanting wind-blown showers, the blackness of hurrying storm-charged cloud, the strange yellow light

that made the leaves look like foliage cast in copper and the skies like a vault of brass, the ominous hiss and shriek of the wind that made the slow buffaloes gallop fast with fear, and filled the air with the hurrying wings of frightened birds, all these were to her only as the sound of trumpet and the smell of powder to the war-horse. The storms were fierce and swift, and rent like a veil the drowsy languor and heat of the usual atmosphere. She would see them coming over the sea from the west at sunset, or gathering above the southern horizon, where the Roman Campagna and the Pontine marshes were steaming with vapour.

When the autumn arrived, she was undismayed by the prospect of winter there, although she felt afraid that it would be more difficult to keep out of sight of men in the season when the waterfowl and the roebuck and the boar were hunted from dawn to twilight in their native haunts.

At this time of the year, too, the flocks came down from the mountains, footsore, travel-tired, with the shepherd and his woman and children behind them footsore also, and the white dogs that were kin to Leone running among the bleating sheep. She saw these

travelling tribes more than once; dusty jaded crowds moving slowly over the marsh and moor. The shepherds are solitary and sullen people for the most part, and instead of a crook they often have a carbine. She avoided them and let them pass on southward to the rich low pastures, afraid that if they knew of her retreat they might rob her of it. As little did she like the hunters who harried the boar in his brake and shot the wildfowl in the marshes. What harm did those wild boars do, living on the roots of the earth and the acorns, or the lovely green-throated drake of the swamp floating his little day away amongst the weeds and lilies?

Except these, there were not many newcomers to fear, her own immediate portion in the Etruscan kingdom was so overgrown with thickets and low timber and matted parasites that walking was almost impracticable, and a bill-hook was needed at almost every step, and the quagmires and swamps that separated it from the vast grain fields to the north deterred all save the boldest and the hardiest from adventuring there.

It never occurred to her that her life would alter. Of love she knew nothing, and marriage, when she thought about it,

seemed to her, as she had said to Andreino, an unequal and unjust division of toil.

Her only fear of men was lest, if they knew of her beloved tombs, they might drive her out and rifle them of the bronze and the pottery as the galley-slave had done of the gold. It was for that reason alone that she scanned the horizon with the keenness of the roebuck, and fled at any sound of steps into the shelter of the thorny coverts with the self-preserving instinct of the mountain hare.

The chill season was at hand, but she was not much in awe of it; she was only afraid lest those sportsmen whose guns echoed over the lonely wastes, or the labourers from the north who passed by on their way to level some remnant of sacred wood or of historic forest, should see her and wonder and talk.

She grew learned in all the ways of nature, and, could she have told or written all she saw, would have lent much to the world's knowledge of fauna and of flora. In proportion as she fled from man so she grew familiar with and endeared to the beasts and birds that filled the moorland with innocent life, and with as deep an interest as ever the Etruscan priests had watched them, to fore-

cast from them augury of the future, did she watch in awe and ecstasy that miracle—perhaps of all the greatest miracle—of nature, the migration of the winged nations of the air.

She did not know what these flights meant, but she observed and pondered on them with intense curiosity and interest as the winged tribes changed their feeding grounds, and came, and went; the northern birds arriving as the songsters of the south fled.

A triangle of silvery grey would float slowly down the yellow light of closing day; it was the phalanx of the storks passing over the country without resting there; wisely distrusting the land beyond all others fatal to all birds. Less wise, though usually so cautious in his ways, there flew here in large bands the bright and gracious lapwing from the frozen canals of the Low Countries and the German forests covered deep in snow.

In a waving line, graceful against the sky as the sway of a reed against the water, a band of the glossy ibis would go by on their aerial voyage to Egypt or to India. The crows sailed over her head from Switzerland or Sweden, not pausing, or, if pausing at

all, dropping on the moor for a few days of rest only, and going straight towards the Soudan or the Blue Nile. The ever-wandering quails fell, in autumn as in spring, panting and exhausted in millions on the beach and turf, so strangely ill-fitted by nature for the long, almost perpetual, flight that nature impelled them to undertake.

There would break upon the silence of the moors at night a sound as of flames crackling and hissing over dry turf and through dry wood ; and it was but the noise of a mile-long troop of wild ducks coming from the Polar seas to the Tuscan lagoons.

The kittiwake and the tarn and the storm swallow forsook their Finnish fjords and Greenland rocks to come and fish in the blue Ligurian waves. The graceful and vivacious actodroma, and the trustful sanderling, alighted here in simple good faith to escape the death grip of the Arctic ice. The cheery godwits settled upon sea or sand, and looked like clouds of silvery smoke touched by red rays of flame. The shore was peopled with the feathered exiles of the north, whilst, inland, the common buzzards arrived with the first gold of autumn to wage

war on rats and snakes in honest open combat; the superb merganser spread his bright plumage to the sun and surf of this unfamiliar shore; and the sea-mew less confidently trusted himself to the south-west sands, where the aloe, and the hesperis, and many an unknown thing growing there, startled him as he made for the inland pools and streams. The laughing-mew and the stream-swallow sought the shelter of the rushes and the reeds, and most of the family of the gulls were to be seen upon the wing above the shallows where sea and river blended. More rarely, and alone, might perchance be seen the northern oyster-catcher (misnamed) hunting his worms and tiny fish in the shallows of the shore, meeting perchance the merry turnstone bent on the same quest, but never wetting his slender feet more than by contact with wet pebbles he was compelled to do. Whilst, by the side of the polar *piscatricides*, with their plumage of snow-white or grey, there were along the line of the breaking waves, and oftener beside the shallows of the swamps, slender and lofty shapes of radiant rose colour, bending their slim long necks, lithe as wands of willow, or standing motionless

and dreaming in the wintry sunshine on the sands ; they were the flamingoes.

Some of them live all the year round here, as in Sicily or Sardinia, but these are not numerous ; in large numbers they only arrive in the cold weather, to depart on the wings of the first March wind.

Though they are so shy of human eyes, she had seen them ever since she had been old enough to come here, and she had always fancied that they were half flower half bird ; no heart of a June rose or cluster of rose-laurel blossoms has ever more lovely crimsons, more delicate flush of colour, than the *phœnicopterus roseus* of Egypt and of Asia. Flying, the flamingoes are like a sunset cloud ; walking, they are like slender spirals of flame traversing the curling foam. When one looks on them across black lines of storm-blown reeds on a November morning in the marshes, as their long throats twist in the air with the flexile motion of the snake, the grace of a lily blown by wind, one thinks of Thebes, of Babylon, of the gorgeous Persia of Xerxes, of the lascivious Egypt of the Ptolemies.

The world has grown grey and joyless in the twilight of age and fatigue, but these

birds keep the colour of its morning. Eos has kissed them.

Farther inland yet, the jays came, saddened and stupid as all these little travellers are when they first arrive in a strange country, missing their dark pine forests of Scandinavia, of Lithuania, of Thuringia. With them there came the redwings, the redstarts, the redbreasts from the mountains, and from further afield, the English and French robin, dearest, cheeriest, brightest, kindest of little birds, and even the robin was sorrowful and timid at the first, though, soon plucking up his gallant little spirit, he sang upon a myrtle spray as gaily as on his native hawthorn branch or apple bough in Westmoreland or Calvados.

All these and many more she watched as they came, singly, or in bands, according to their habits, upon the chilly wind that blew from their native north countries.

In the moorland ponds and the marsh rivulets there were the persecuted coots with her all the year round, the water-hens, too, in their demure garb of olive-brown and grey, and their brilliant relative the beautiful porphyry, showing the sapphires and the rubies of his feathers in all seasons, amidst

the white vapours of a wintry dawn as amidst the gold of the pond-marigolds in mid-summer ; and over all the land, all seasons through, the red-legged partridges ran under the cistus and rosemary they best love, and the cushats, though their voices were mute, stayed at home and braved the autumn rains and winter sea-fogs that stretched to the mountain's foot.

All these innocent and most lovely creatures had cruel foes ; cruellest foe of all the pitiless snarer or sportsman who had no better aim in his own miserable life than to slaughter these lives that were so much lovelier than his own.

But the moors are vast, and vast the meadows virgin of the scythe, and vast the labyrinths of forests and of undergrowth stretching at the mountain's foot. There was many a lagoon, where never other voices than the birds' were heard ; there was many a league of woodland, where the thorns of the firebush and the sloe and the tangle of matted vegetation made impenetrable barriers to the greed of trappers.

When the boats came at night with the lanterns to daze and bewilder the roosting wild ducks, and the cowardly showers of

shot fell like hail on the unresisting myriads, Musa could do nothing; she could only listen with throbbing heart and clenching hands, and laugh aloud in derision to think that men called the hill-fox a robber and the falcon bird of prey. But when she found the nets stretched across the pools, and the *paratoio* set on the turf, and the setters of these had gone away for the night, fearing the deadly vapours of the soil, then she, seeing these fell things at twilight, and not being afraid, would wait and go without sleep, and when the night was fully down, and the invaders of the birds' kingdom had gone to some distant knot of houses on the hillside or the shore, or to some shepherd's hut, she would work her hardest at the snares, pulling up the stakes from the ground, dragging the huge nets out of the water, hacking down with her hatchet the poles, and destroying all she could destroy of those treacherous engines.

If the men had ever suspected her, if they had ever returned before dawn and come upon her at her work of demolition, they would have shot her in all probability, as they would have shot the poor birds, and with no more scruple or remorse after it.

She knew that very well; but her love of the soft wild things of lagoon and woodland was stronger than self-love, and the bold blood that filled her veins was warm' with pleasure as she strained at the wood or the cordage of the great traps closing in the mouths of streams, or drawn round the sleeping places of the unconscious palmipedes.

It was not often that she had the chance of saving her feathered friends, for not very often did the snarers leave their prey, but whenever the power came in her way she made use of it, and whenever she saw ill-looking fellows, strangers or natives, coming in upon the territory which she regarded as the birds' and beasts' and hers alone, she followed them unseen, creeping under the heather of the uplands, and the cane-brakes of the swamps, to watch their choice of place, and foil their efforts if she could.

To a snarer of birds she would have had no more mercy than he would have had to her, if he had known what she was about; and she had almost as much scorn for the so-called sportsmen, hiding amongst the reeds to take the bright porphyryion unawares, or steering their boat through water strewn with a thousand dead and dying coots.

Her watching of the sea and land birds, and her care over them, made the absorbing interest of her lonely life. Her wants were so few that they were soon provided for, and almost all the day long she could pass in the open air ; like Borrow, she did not fear 'nature's clean bath, the kindly rain.' When she went home dripping with water, she changed her clothes, lighted a wood fire, and was none the worse. Leone shook himself, and slept after the rain, and so did she.

In that free life she grew still taller and still stronger, slender and supple, and fit model for a young Artemis, had any sculptor been there to copy the fine and graceful lines of her limbs in the modelling clay that comes from Tiber.

She, like the flittermouse, passed the winter there as tranquil as though beside Joconda's hearth ; nay, more tranquil, for in her old home the constraint of severe habits, the enforced household labours, and the squalor and the sickness of the people round had been irksome and painful to her. Here she was sole possessor of her painted chambers, and without had the wide moors and the blue sea to roam over as she would.

Even the sea was kind to her ; for one

night, when there was a great storm and she sat beside her fire in the warrior's sepulchre, Leone howling by the kennel tomb where the Etruscan dog's ashes lay, there was a barque wrecked a mile or so down the coast; and when the weather cleared on the third day—for the white squalls of violent wind and rain upon these waters usually last three days—she went down to the beach to see the sea, that was sobbing still like a child after vain passion, and, washed up upon the driftwood and the glass-wrack of the rocks, she found a little boat bruised, but still serviceable; doubtless belonging to the lost brig that had foundered with all hands off the dark grim peaks of Monte Argentario.

It was flotsam and jetsam, and she took it as a sea-gift.

It was light and shapely, and its two oars were in it. She dumbly thanked God for it; having a real boat, for what she had made for herself was but an awkward and unseaworthy tub, she felt as though wings had grown upon her shoulders. The sea seemed to be all her own, as it had seemed to the Tyrrhene pirates three thousand years before to be theirs and none others.

She was as thankful as a dog ; she dragged her treasure up over the rocks out of the wet sand in which it was bedded bows downward, and hid it in a little aperture she knew of in the cliffs within a few yards of the water.

With this boat for her use when she would, she felt strong and free as any osprey. It was another means of livelihood also ; she could make a net, and catch a fish, as well as any man of the sea hamlets ; in the hill-villages they never tasted fish, their few folk were too far off and too lazy by far to drag their limbs a dozen miles down to the beach at any time, and the shore folk were too indolent and too feeble to go to them. But she, who was neither idle nor weak, determined to carry fish to the hovels of the plains and hills if she were ever pressed for hunger, and get their bread and dead goat's flesh in return. So she said to herself as she hauled up the boat over the stones, though she would never take the lives even of the fish if she could help it. And she felt satisfied, having her future thus provided for ; it seemed to her as if she could live thus so easily all her days.

With the winter, she clothed herself in the

warm, thick, woollen clothes made of lamb's wool that Joconda had woven for her ; and at night, when rain, like the rain of the tropics, poured on the sandstone rock that made her roof, and was sweeping in sheets of water over Maremma from mountain to sea, she span at her wheel, as Tanaquil had done before her, by the low light of one oil wick burning in the lofty candelabra whose like had charmed the delicate and lofty taste of Sappho's Hellas.

Sometimes a snow-storm would sweep over the moors and the sea ; sometimes the broad lagoon, formed where the marsh waters joined the salt pools in the sand, was one mass of boiling, wind-lashed, turgid, yellow froth ; sometimes thunder roiled and blue lightning flamed above the bare peaks and crags of the easterly mountains, and a darkness that could be felt descended at noontide on Maremma as on the land of the plagues ; sometimes, rarest of all, there was the film of frost on all the moors, and the terns and smews had to tap with their bills at a sheet of ice on their tarns and streams, and fancied themselves back in their own Greenland or Siberia.

But rough weather, and wet weather,

were the portion rather of autumn than of winter, and for the most part the sun shone above the Arctic birds that had come southward for shelter, and upon the child of Saturnino gathering the fallen wood off the moor, or driving her little boat through surf and spray. The winter-time was short—shorter than counted by the solstice—for by the turn of the new year the corn was springing and covering, like a thin green cloud, all the vast plains to the north; and on the yet vaster grass lands, where no foot of a ploughman or hand of a mower was ever known, under the gauze veil of the rime frost, the bulbs of the wild crocus and the wild narcissus began to feel their trustful way upward through the earth like little children timid in the dark, yet confident because they think that God is near.

Then, in those still, starlit nights, cleared by the magic wand of the frost till all the lustrous sky seemed alive with throbbing light, Musa would leave her hearth and lamp and go up into the air, and stand and look at the silent procession of those distant worlds of which none had ever told her anything.

She had no conception what they were.

She knew that fishermen and mariners steered by them all night long, and that was all she knew.

The gorgeous constellation of Perseus hung above the sea, and over the weird peaks of Elba the great star Aldebaran burned; the Golden Plough was driven on its fiery way down the north-eastern heavens; above the great south moors, far down in the purple night, where Rome was, there flamed Orion, and straight above her head, in the zenith, Auriga shone, holding in his hand Zeta and Eta, the dreaded storm-bringers of the Greeks. To her they had neither name nor message, yet she would stand and gaze at them for hours. Surely they could not burn there only that ships might steer?

Her only idea of them was inspired by the songs of the Maremmano people, which call on Hespera to help their loves as on a living spirit, and hymn the star that has an angel by its side, a young angel—'*un' angiolin*'—attending it always on its path through the shining heavens; a graceful fancy, which took root as a fact in her belief, so that she would gravely gaze upward for hours, trying to see the winged servitors

of the constellations ; and sometimes she grew angry with them, thinking, ‘ are there so many angels, cannot they warn the tartane off the shoals ? cannot they stoop and let a light shine on the sea when their stars are covered and the boats go aground in the dark ? ’

The planets and the stars were as great a perplexity to her as the birds, and much less consolation.

Every one knows (or at least every one who takes thought of these things, which, perhaps, is a small minority) that to see birds in their own homes is difficult. The nest of the blackhead is made so like in hue to the thornbush it rests on, the nest of the cisticola is woven so wisely amongst the rushes of the waterside, the flight is so swift, the vigilance is so great, the feathers are so often so like the brown of the bark or the grey-green of the sedges, that even the quickest eye may see but little of them, and even the gold of the oriole and the blue of the magnificent chough may escape detection in the shadows of the woods. But with tenderness for them and patience they may be traced in their daily ways and wanderings, and few lives repay attention to them so delightfully as do the lives of the birds.

She was herself so much a native of the woods, she was as motionless as the kingfisher himself beside a stream, she was as solitary and as wary of men as the woodpecker, she was so heedful never to disturb a nest, or startle a callow brood; and as her recompense she grew as acquainted and familiar with the winged tribes as was ever Audubon or Naumann. She had not their knowledge, indeed, but she had more than their love. When the naturalist fires on a sanderling or a bunting, he may be a man of science and culture, but he is no lover of birds.

Musa knew very few even of the common names of either the flowers or the birds; of their names in men's books she knew not one, but she knew the look and the season of every blossom that blew, and she knew the haunts and the habits of most of the singers, and the divers, and the many creatures that made populous the wastes around her, and at night could tell by the manner of their flight whether the barn-owl or the *Athene Noctua* went past her, whether the wild-duck was going through the shadows or the night-loving plover.

She knew the northern birds went away with the first warm wind of February ; she had every year since she could remember seen the gulls, and gannets, and storm-swallows, and all their congeners, take their flight due north, never to return until winter returned too.

She missed the timid and yet bold creatures of the Pole, after which the people of Santa Tarsilla had named her ; and she missed the little red birds of the north with their tiny sweet song, piping when the full melody of the nightingale was mute.

But whilst the sky was full of storm clouds and the sea of froth and foam, and the snow was still half-way down the sides of the black Argentaro rocks, and wholly clothed the Apennines, she was cheered by the glad exuberant chatter of the dauntless starling.

Then, as the year grew a little older, and the blackthorn of the brakes grew white with blossom before the leaf, and the green silent wolds that enwrapped the dead cities and the dead nations were rosy, and purple, and lilac with the springing of the anemones ; then, though the little robin no more showed his red waistcoat under the myrtle scrub,

in the stead of him and his came back the truants, the birds which, by the law laid down by naturalists, could claim the country as a home, since it was there they made their nests.

Why some went, some stayed, was a strange, unending perplexity to Musa, and a perplexity indeed it is.

Why does the blue thrush stay on the same spot all the year long and all the years he lives? and why does his brother the stone thrush go off on autumnal equinoxials as far as the White Nile? Why indeed? The birds can laugh at science; their secrets none shall know.

Musa sorely missed her friends of winter, but the budding of the crocus and the daffodil brought her many others in their stead, and soon she grew reconciled to the new comers and knew their looks and haunts and ways as well as those of their predecessors.

With earliest break of the year the red buzzard came, so much more cowardly and cruel than his cousin the python-slayer, to watch all the summer long warily amidst the water-stars, and the pond plaintain, to seize some unwary moorhen, or snatch a

coot away as she brought the rushes together to begin a home.

All the moist ground that stretched for leagues on leagues southward, ground that trembled with water as human eyes will do with unshed tears, was covered with little feathered people who loved the marsh, and pool, and found health and nourishment where men found death.

There the sedge thrush hung his nest upon a bulrush, lining it with cobwebs and with shred rosemary as softly as a lady sleeps on down; there the bearded titmouse would slumber upon a reed, covering tenderly with his wing the female he loved so well; there the pewits, and the finches, and the chats, and the cricket singers, and the grasshopper warblers, and all the multitudes of *oscines*, fluttered and flirted, and darted and dived, and made the lonely wastes mirthful and peopled. The fisher-heron, as timid a solitary as any that the Thebaïd knew, walked by choice rather beside the brackish pools where fresh and salt water met, or along the white line of the rippling surf, eyes downward and head bent, meditative, melancholy, and absorbed. The sheldrake shared his taste for those saline shallows

where the salt club-marsh and the pungent sea-rush throve, which have defied and made the despair of all engineering skill from the days of the Etruscans ; and Musa grew well acquainted with him on the soaked sand where the many streams of her moorland trickled together, and formed, with the in-running sea, a broad, shining, reedy mere—the breeding-place of many a noxious vapour, but the delight of her and of the birds.

When the asphodel was all golden and white over the green deserts of Southern Maremma, and she left the sea-shore for the inland charm of fresh-born vegetation, and the undergrowth was like snow with the laurestinus flowers, and the thyme and the basil began to be dewy and fragrant underneath her feet, she found the fieldfares that had come from Nubian sands, and the tiny fly-catcher that was putting on his ruby coat for spring-time and for courting, and the song-sparrow busy building his high nest in some solitary pine and lining it solidly with bark-fibre or with fish scales, and the bush-singer hanging his upon a branch of thorn or under close leaves of myrtle, and the red-breasted shrike darting on butterflies and

locusts as the falcons on the herons, and the bee-eater falling through the bright air on his prey, and the green woodpecker drilling a citadel for himself in the stem of a dwarf cork tree, and the hoopoes patiently following the buffaloes' slow march, and the blue nut-thatch holding his seed beneath his claw as a dog holds a bone under his foot, and his cousins the *sittæ* of the rosy tails descending tree trunks head foremost, and the woodlark making music, from a tuft of rosemary or broom, clearer and sweeter than the love-songs of any lute ; and with these countless others, too many to name the half of, and Philomel herself for ever pouring her heart out in rapture, as she does all day long and all night long from the first Lenten lily to the last midsummer rose.

Altogether they made such a jocund company upon these unknown and silent wastes that it was the saddest pity that Milton and Shakespeare and Shelley could not awake and come and hear. Oftentimes in such a place one longs for them, and wonders as the children wonder of the flowers that die with summer—where are they gone?

She had the heaven-born faculty of observation of the poets, and she had that

instinct of delight in natural beauty which made Linnæus fall on his knees before the English gorse and thank God for having made so beautiful a thing. This child of the foolish and sensual Serapia and of the murderer Mastarna was a poet at heart; in another land, and under other circumstances, the world might have heard of her and have hearkened as eagerly to her as the people of Santa Tarsilla had listened to her singing. Had study and wise companionship been given to her she might have found utterance for all the thoughts and fancies, the dreams and the affections, that thronged on her amidst the woods and on the sea, but left her dumb and moved to a mute joy, keen almost to pain.

In a freer and a gladder day than hers, in time of Urbinan or Florentine or Venetian greatness, she might have forced her own way up to light and learning, and made the heaven of some great soul, and been crowned with the golden laurel on the Capitol.

As it was, her sympathies and her imaginings spent themselves in solitary song as she made the old strings of the lute throb in low cadence when she sat solitary by her hearth on the rock floor of the grave;

and out of doors her eyes filled and her lips laughed when she wandered through the leafy land and found the warbler's nest hung upon the reeds, or the first branching asphodel in flower. She could not have told why these made her happy, why she could watch for half a day untired the little wren building where the gladwyn blossomed on the water's edge. It was only human life that hurt her, embittered her, and filled her with hatred of it.

As she walked one golden noon by the Sasso Scritto, clothed with its myrtle and thyme and its quaint cacti that later would bear their purple heads of fruit, the shining sea beside her, and above her the bold arbutus-covered heights, with the little bells of the sheep sounding on their sides, she saw a large fish, radiant as a gem, with eyes like rubies. Some men had it; a hook was in its golden gills, and they had tied its tail to the hook so that it could not stir, and they had put it in a pail of water that it might not die too quickly, die ere they could sell it. A little further on she saw a large green and gold snake, one of the most harmless of all earth's creatures, that only asked to creep into the sunshine, to

sleep in its hole in the rock, to live out its short, innocent life under the honey smell of the rosemary; the same men stoned it to death, heaping the pebbles and broken sandstone on it, and it perished slowly in long agony, being large and tenacious of life. Yet a little further on, again, she saw a big square trap of netting, with a blinded chaffinch as decoy. The trap was full of birds, some fifty or sixty of them, all kinds of birds, from the plain brown minstrel, beloved of the poets, to the merry and amber-winged oriole, from the dark grey or russet-bodied fly-catcher and whinchat to the glossy and handsome jay, cheated and caught as he was going back to the north; they had been trapped and would be strung on a string and sold for a copper coin the dozen; and of many of them the wings or the legs were broken and the eyes were already dim. The men who had taken them were seated on the thymy turf, grinning like apes, with pipes in their mouths and a flask of wine between their knees.

She passed on, helpless.

She thought of words that Joconda had once quoted to her, words which said that men were made in God's likeness!

In the loneliness and meditation of her life the pity of her nature deepened, and her scorn of cowardice grew still stronger. She was brave, self-reliant, and tender to all those creatures whom the human race, because it understands not their language, chooses to call dumb. Of the human beast she had not fear, but a great mistrust.

The short winter, the enchanting spring-tide, came and went, and none had traced her to her hiding-place ; the solitudes around had kept her harmless secret as they kept the mysteries of the buried multitudes. The only creature she ever spoke to was little Zefferino, and he did not tell of her because he loved her herb soup, her pullet's eggs, her store of bilberries, her skill at finding edible mushrooms ; and she let him come and nibble when he would, squatting like a little faun upon the floor of the tomb, and holding some platter or bowl of the dead Etruscans tight in his brown hands.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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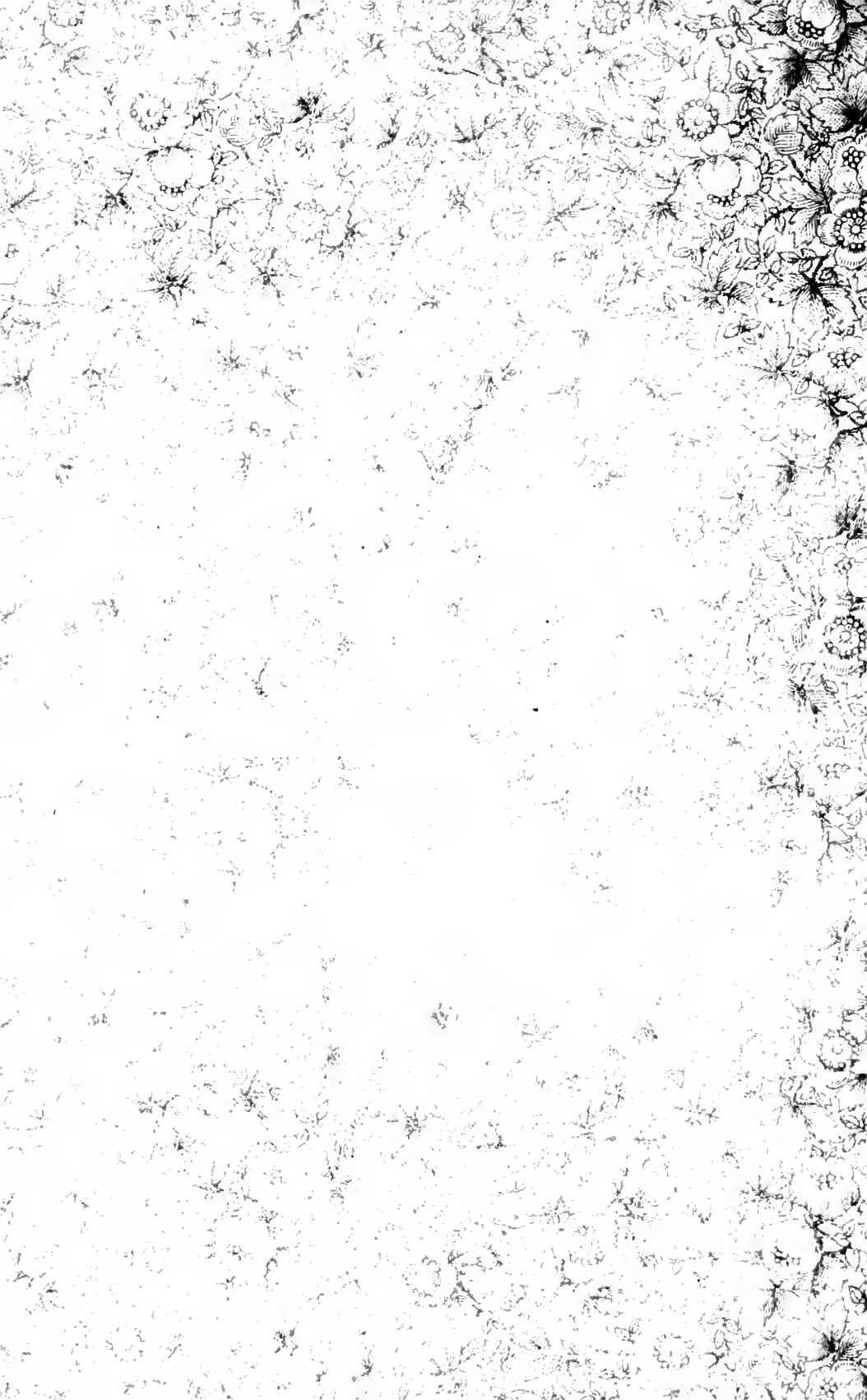
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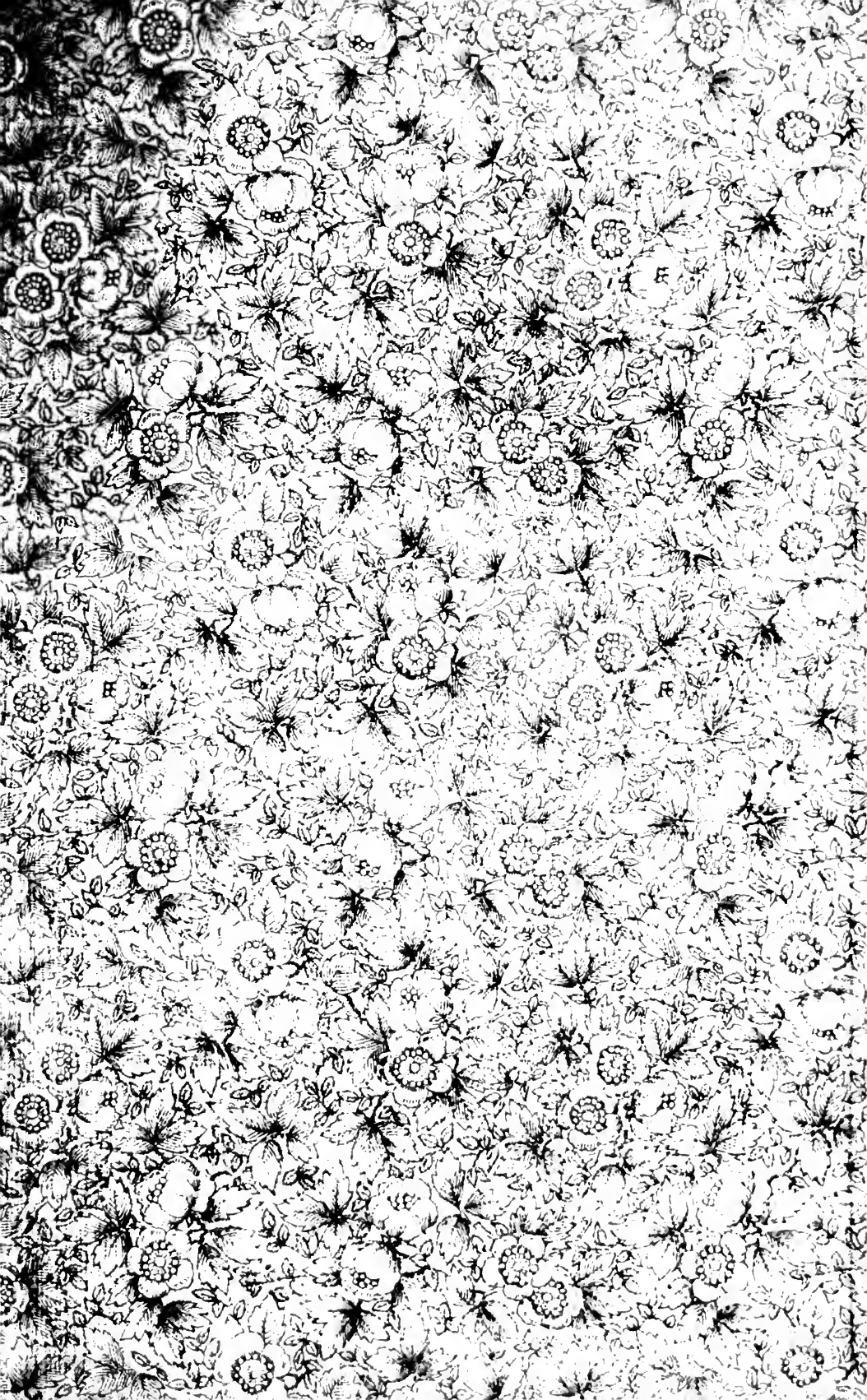
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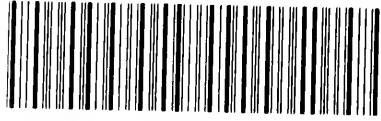
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